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ISHMAEL

ISHMAEL

A Novel

BY THE AUTHOR OF
"LADY AUDLEY'S SECRET"

ETC. ETC. ETC.

In Three Volumes

VOL. III.



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ISHMAEL.

CHAPTER I.

‘THOUGH THOU SET THY NEST AMONG THE STARS.’

NOT often in the history of mankind has earth been the theatre of such a scene of splendour as that which glorified Paris in the springtide and early summer of 1867. Perchance in some far-off Indian city, in ancient Benares or many-towered Delhi, there might be a greater glitter of gold and gems, statelier processions, Oriental pomp of palanquins and plumes, caparisoned elephants, peacock thrones, turbans luminous with emerald and ruby; but that barbaric show would have had but feeble historic meaning as compared with this meeting of the kings of the West, the statesmen and warriors, the financiers and long-headed schemers, the makers and unmakers of kings. It was a mighty rendezvous of the

powers of the civilised world, a gathering of crowned heads, all seemingly intent upon the amusement of the hour, yet each in his heart of hearts intent upon making good use of his opportunities, each determined to turn the occasion to good political account.

The Czar was among the first to come, accompanied by his two sons. It was not long since their elder brother had been laid in his coffin, heaped round with the fairest flowers of Nice, a fair young form, a calm dead face in the midst of roses and lilies, pale image of an imperial youth which had been but faintly reflected on the stream of life, surviving only in a photograph. William of Prussia was there, flushed with the tremendous victory of Sadowa—victory owed in great part to the neutrality of France, a service as yet unrecompensed as witness this late *fiasco* of the Luxembourg treaty. Beside the stern soldier-king in the open carriage in which he entered Paris sat the two master-spirits of his kingdom—his mighty general, Moltke, his mightier chancellor, Bismarck. Who could tell what dreams brooded behind those steel-blue eyes of the senator—large, full, projecting, luminous with the light of a master mind; what hidden plans lurked beneath that

air of frank good fellowship, that outspoken Teutonic simplicity? Cavour, giant among statesmen, was as dead as Machiavelli; but his policy and his capacity lived in his Prussian pupil.

The East sent its potentates to swell the royal crowd. The Sultan's large grave face, with dark solemn eyes, looked calm and unmoved upon the Imperial show, while his suzerain, the Viceroy of Egypt, had come to see what kind of people these Frenchmen were who wanted to cut a highway for the ships of the world through the sands of the desert. Even far-off Japan was represented by the brother of its secular ruler.

Princes there were amidst that brilliant throng, lighter souls, nursing no deep-laid schemes, hiding no slumbering fires—princes who came honestly to see the show, and to drink the cup of pleasure in that season which seemed one long festival. England's future king was there, in the flower of his youth, kindly, *débonnaire*, keenly intelligent, first favourite among the *élite* of Paris, a popular figure among the populace; the young princes of Belgium, the princes of Prussia—they who were to come three years later with fire and sword, bringing in their train death and ruin, burning instead of beauty. There was the Crown Prince of Orange—a *prince pour rire*,

and princelings and princesses without number. Never saw the earth such a gathering of its great ones, or a city so fitted for the scene of a festival. The omnipotence of the Emperor, the millions poured out like water by Prefect Haussmann, had made Paris a city of palaces, a place in which even the monuments and statues of the past were scraped and purified to match the whiteness of the new boulevards—a city planned for the rich, built for the children of pleasure and of folly, as it would seem to Diogenes, looking in the summer eventide along that dazzling line of boulevards, that mighty thoroughfare which swept in a wide arc from the Bastille to the Champs Elysées, a double range of monumental mansions, theatres, restaurants, cafés, drinking places of every kind and every quality—a fanfare of voices and music and clinking glasses and airy laughter, from sundown to midnight, an illumination two leagues long.

Who can wonder that the stranger, blinded by these earthly splendours, steeped in the intoxication that hangs in the very air of such a city, should have ignored the storm-clouds brooding over the Imperial palace—loss of honour beyond all measure, loss of men by

thousands, and of money by millions, yonder in Mexico, loss of prestige by the inglorious neutrality of last year, loss of popularity as shown by every new plebiscite? The stranger saw no clouds in that summer sky, dreamt not of a besieged and famished Paris, in which these very streets should run with blood, these fair white stones should be torn up and heaped into barricades, on which men should fight to extinction, hand to hand, brother against brother, in the fury of Civil War. He saw only the glory of the world's carnival; he heard only the sounds of music, and dancing, of feasting and revelry.

One of the most magnificent spectacles in that season of splendour was the review of the Imperial Guard in the Bois de Boulogne, when sixty thousand men, under the command of Maréchal Canrobert, assembled on that very spot where three years later William of Prussia, looking on to-day as guest and ally, was to review his own troops amidst the gloom of a surrendered city. The racecourse was the scene of the review, and a mighty crowd covered the plain. Lady Constance Danetree's barouche was stationed in the front rank of carriages, and not remote from the Imperial party; and on the seat opposite Lady Constance, banked in by

huge bouquets of Dijon roses and stephanotis, sat Amélie Jarz, looking her prettiest in a *bébé* toilette of cream-coloured china crape and pale pink rosebuds.

She was there by one of those series of little accidents which a girl of *nous* knows how to arrange beforehand, and she was assuredly *not* there by the desire of her hostess. Poor Madame Jarz and Hortense were sitting in their hired victoria afar off, in an outer fringe of disreputable smartness and shabby respectability—*voitures de place* crowded with *petits bourgeois* and their families, victorias and four-in-hands gorgeous with the queens and princesses the dowagers and sweet girl-graduates of the *demi-monde*. But Amélie was here among the top strawberries in the basket, in the midst of *la société rup*—here smiling sweetly at the woman whom of all women upon this earth she most hated. She had contrived it all herself—had contrived to put Lady Constance in a position in which it was impossible *not* to ask her—and she was here triumphant. The end in her mind justified the means. For the rest, having once been cajoled into giving the invitation, Lady Constance thought no more about it. The Jarz girl was bad style, but not much

worse than that princess of an Austrian house who was then one of the leading lights of Parisian society, and whom Thérèse, the star of the Alcazar, had described as ‘*aussi canaille que moi.*’

‘Poor mother!’ sighed Amélie, standing up to survey the crowd through her field-glasses, and perceiving afar off that outermost circle of shabbiness and finery, something like the crowd on the hill-side opposite the grand stand at Epsom. ‘I’m afraid she and Hortense will see nothing but a cloud of dust and those dreadful people in the drags.’

Those ‘dreadful people’ were the very ladies whose gowns, *coiffures*, and manners this damsel from the *Sacré Cœur* had taken pains to imitate.

‘How grave the Czar looks!’ exclaimed Amélie, wheeling round to survey the Imperial group. ‘Not quite happy. I suppose an Emperor of Russia never feels himself quite secure from bullet or dagger. They say the police have been watching him ever since he came to Paris, that he is encircled with an invisible band of detectives.’

Constance shrugged her shoulders with a preoccupied air. Emperors and dynasties were

of no moment to her. She was intent upon discovering one face amidst that vast crowd—Ishmael's face—the face of the man whom she had met several times in society since the beginning of April, but who had never, so far as she could tell, taken the faintest trouble to bring about any such meeting. Taking his conduct as an evidence of his feelings she could but think that he regarded her with supreme indifference; yet she did not so think. To a sensitive woman there are other tokens of affection, subtler, more precious than outward actions; and in Constance Danetree's heart there was a growing faith in Ishmael's love for her. He might have his own motives for holding himself in check; he might be afraid of the difference in their social rank, doubtful of her as a woman of fashion, perhaps even a coquette. He might be only biding his time. It was not for her to precipitate matters. Not by one tone or one look had the well-trained woman of society betrayed herself. Even Amélie's eyes, sharpened by jealousy, could not penetrate beneath the mask of good manners with which a well-bred woman hides her feelings.

He was there—there among the *élite* of the assemblage. He came to Lady Constance's

barouche presently, after having stopped at ever so many carriages on the way. The review began while he was standing there, detained by Amélie, who held him by her incessant prattle, as the mariner held the wedding guest; and the troops once in motion it would have been difficult for him to recross to his former place. So he stayed, and stood beside Lady Constance's carriage during the whole of the show. Other people came and went, with most of whom he had a bowing acquaintance, as one of the most conspicuous men in Paris.

'You have never been in the army, Monsieur?' asked Lady Constance.

'I have not enjoyed that distinction. I drew a lucky number at the beginning of my career, when to have served would have hindered my making my way in life. So far I was lucky.'

'Have you not been lucky in all things?'

'No, Lady Constance, not in all things.'

'And yet you have the reputation of being the most fortunate man in Paris.'

'In Paris to have made money counts for good fortune—everything else is an insignificant detail in the mind of your thoroughbred Parisian. We are a progressive nation. The

government of Louis Philippe preached only one doctrine—"Make money." The Emperor goes further, and says, "Make money—anyhow you can."

This little conversation set Lady Constance wondering. What was that portion of life in which the great contractor had been unfortunate? Her womanly heart, answering for her, made sure that this misfortune must have something to do with love. He had loved unwisely—unhappily—or had loved one who was dead. The old heart-wounds were only half healed perhaps, or only just beginning to be healed under a new influence.

The show was over: a gorgeous pageant of a few hours, ending in the golden light of a June afternoon. The Imperial carriages were moving slowly away. Lady Constance's coachman prepared to follow.

'Shall we take you back to Paris?' she asked, and Ishmael accepted.

For the first time he seated himself in that perfectly-hung barouche, displacing Amélie and her flower-garden. The young lady now nestled by her hostess's side.

It was lovely weather, and the wood was like fairyland, a fairyland of fine carriages and

fine clothes, smiling faces, light-laughter: beauty, wit, audacity: charlatan, knave, dupe, fool, speculator, trickster, gamester, adventurer of every type—but all of such a brilliant surface, with a flush of hothouse flowers making a glow of pure bright colour everywhere, as in a floral carnival.

Suddenly, amidst the rhythmical trot of horses and musical jingle of harness, amidst the voices and laughter, and the splash of the waterfall yonder, there came from the front—where the Imperial carriages headed the train—the report of a pistol. Then a sudden uproar—a tumult of voices.

What was it? Only an attempt to shoot the Czar, made and failed in ignominiously by one Berezowski, a mad young Polish enthusiast—an honest simple youth of eighteen summers, who thought God had charged him with the Divine mission of destroying a despot, and liberating a people. Unhappily there are many such false Christs, whose doom is for the most part the wheel or the scaffold, wild-horses, or the stake. Young Berezowski was luckier, and escaped with penal servitude, much to the displeasure of the Czar, who did not relish

this episode in his hospitable entertainment at the Elysée.

The crowd would have massacred Berezowski on the spot, in a tumult of enthusiasm for that monarch against whom France had been in arms twelve years ago ; but the police intervened and carried the lad off, serenely enduring the anguish of a wrist shattered by the bursting of his pistol, and mildly protesting his regret at being troublesome to a land which had given him a home and a livelihood, and which he loved for its own sake.

The tumult, the confusion, the riding to and fro of general officers, gendarmes, functionaries of all grades, gorgeous in scarlet and gold and plumed helmets, lasted some time, during which the triple rank of carriages stopped.

The reports which reached Lady Constance Danetree at about half a quarter of a mile from the theatre of the event were various and conflicting. First she was told—by her English footman who knew a little French—that the Czar was killed, and the Emperor Napoleon dangerously wounded. Then a passer-by informed her that the Empress Eugénie had thrown herself in front of the Czar and received the bullet à

pleine poitrine. Then came a rumour that one of the young princes was shot through the head. Finally Ishmael, who had alighted and walked to the scene of action, returned with the reassuring news that the bullet had only pierced the nostrils of a horse and slightly wounded a lady on the opposite side of the road. The second barrel had burst in the would-be assassin's hand.

At last the carriages rolled onward again. The Emperor of all the Russias was safe in the Elysée by this time. The sun was an hour nearer the west.

‘I think I must give you some tea after all this dust and excitement,’ said Lady Constance, smiling at Ishmael, as her carriage rolled past her shrubberies of acacia and magnolia, and stopped under the large *marquise* in front of her hall door. ‘But perhaps you do not drink tea. You would rather go on to the boulevard and enjoy your afternoon *absinthe*.’

‘I never take *absinthe*, and I am very fond of tea à l’*Anglaise*.’

‘And mine is caravan tea.’

They alighted, and Ishmael for the first time in his life crossed Constance Danetree's threshold, crossed it with reluctant feet, yet unable to resist the most potent temptation that had ever assailed

him in the whole course of his practical straightforward life.

He had been in many of the most elegant houses in Paris, had seen pictures, and statues, and flowers, and marble pavements, silk, and velvet, cloth of gold, embroideries from China and Persia, Japan and Nagpore, *ad nauseam*; and yet looking round Lady Constance Danetree's *salon*, with its adjacent boudoir visible through a broad archway, across which a tawny velvet curtain hung carelessly, it seemed to him as if he had never seen the true elegance of home-life before. Here was an interior stamped with the individuality of the woman who lived in it—her piano—unlike other pianos—her bookstands, and low luxurious chairs, her portfolios of prints and photographs—unlike other bookstands and chairs and portfolios—her grouping of hothouse flowers, the table at which she wrote, her work-tables, her cosy corners, half in shadow yet glowing with Oriental colour, her open fireplace with its bank of exotic greenery and rare old amber Satsuma jars—everywhere the traces of a woman's taste; and, like a note of life and friendliness, the three dogs grouped on a huge polar bear-skin in front of the wide sunny window.

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Two tall and solemn footmen, of the true British breed, brought in a tea table with Queen Anne urn and old English china, and Lady Constance poured out the tea. Her version of *le five o'clock* was a much simpler reading than that of Madame Arnould, on the *entre-sol* in the Champs Elysée. Amelie squatted gracefully on a low stool at Constance's feet.

'I think this English institution of five o'clock is positively charming,' she said. 'It is simply the pleasantest hour of the day; but I never expected to see a business man like Monsieur Ishmael waste his time upon drinking tea with two ladies.'

'It is once in a lifetime,' answered Ishmael with his grave smile, a beautiful smile which lighted the strongly-marked face with a sudden glow. 'There must be an oasis in every desert.'

'And you call this a green spot in life—to sit here in Lady Constance's *salon*: you who have the key to all the finest houses in Paris.'

'I do not profess to have any such key, Mademoiselle.'

'Oh, but you have. You have the golden key which opens all the doors of the great world. You and the Rothschilds can go anywhere, do anything say anything: whatever you do or

say will be right. If my father were only like you, instead of being a petty official, pettily paid.'

She gave a little impatient sigh, and stopped herself, feeling that she had gone too far. 'After all, money is a poor thing,' she said; 'it cannot buy happiness. I know some of my school-fellows married for money who are miserable. Heaven protect me from such a fate as theirs.'

'But are not all marriages nowadays more or less a question of ways and means?' inquired Ishmael. 'I have only studied the institution from afar, as a disinterested observer; yet it seems to me that wedlock under the second Empire means the union of incomes rather than of hearts.'

'And can you see such a state of things without horror?' exclaimed Amélie, while Lady Constance Danetree listened in silence, reclining in her chair, one white tapering hand caressing the Pomeranian's still whiter coat, the left hand supporting her firmly-rounded chin—self-possessed, self-contained, the image of passionless womanhood.

'It cannot concern me what stakes the players play for—hearts or diamonds,' answered Ishmael; 'I am only a looker-on at the game. I shall never marry.'

Not a ripple of emotion stirred Constance Danetree's features. The hand which smoothed the favourite's silken coat never faltered in its slow monotonous movement, there was not a quiver of sculptured eyelids or sculptured lips. The face—statue-like in its calm beauty—betrayed nothing.

And yet this deliberate utterance of a deliberate resolve was like a blow struck at the heart of the woman who sat there in such statuesque repose, caressing her lap-dog. It meant the fall of her castle in the air, the end of all her dreams. It meant, perhaps, that she had been duped and fooled by her own vanity. For Amélie the blow was no less crushing; and she was not so skilled in the concealment of her feelings, or it may be was wanting in the heroic temperament.

‘That is a resolution *pour rire*,’ she exclaimed with a little half-hysterical laugh. ‘Whenever in my brief experience, I have heard a man or a woman solemnly announce the determination never to marry, I have generally discovered afterwards that he or she was at that very moment on the high road to the altar. A widower usually vows as much, and you will own that the widower who swears hardest, who

tells you that his heart lies buried in the grave of his dead wife, is always the first to marry again. It is a fatal symptom.'

'There are men who swear for the love of swearing,' answered Ishmael. 'There are circumstances in my past life, the bitter memories of a great sorrow, which render marriage impossible for me. You may believe, Mademoiselle, that for once in your life you have heard a man swear in good faith. I shall keep my vow.'

He took up his hat and cane, and offered his hand to Lady Constance, who half rose, with a delicious air of languor and fatigue, and put her cool white hand in his. She could but notice that his was cold as ice.

'Forgive me for wearying you with such egotistical prosings,' he said, as they shook hands.

'You have not wearied me: I am always interested in my fellow-creatures.'

'But you are looking pale and exhausted: I fear it is I who have tired you.'

'Not at all. The sun and the dust and the show have been tiresome, that is all. Good-bye.'

She gave him a gracious curtsey as he went out at the door.

Good-bye love, good-bye hope, good-bye the fair future we two were to have shared! That was what was meant by those two syllables, spoken by smiling lips.

'She could not have cared a straw for him,' thought Amélie, watchful of a rival even in the midst of her own agitations.

My dear Amélie, the horses are waiting to take you home, and it is bad for them to stand long after such a day,' said Constance. 'Do you think you would mind going at once? I am due at a dinner at the English Embassy, and then there is the ball at the Hôtel de Ville, where I suppose I must put in an appearance; and I ought to rest a little.'

'How good of you to keep the horses for me! I am going this instant,' replied Amélie. 'You talk of the ball as if it were a burden; and they say it will be the grandest sight that has ever been seen in Paris, and yet nothing compared to the ball to-morrow night at the Tuileries. Papa has told us all about it: he has had a good deal to do with the arrangements. The gardens are to be illuminated with fifty thousand gas jets, and there will be the electric light, and Bengal fires—a perfect fairy-land.'

‘My experience of such balls is that one has to sit in one’s carriage for two or three hours, within a quarter of a mile of the palace gates, hearing gens-d’armes give impossible orders, and coachmen grumble and swear; and that one finally reaches the scene of the festival in a state of utter exhaustion,’ said Constance wearily. ‘But I suppose I shall have to go.’

CHAPTER II.

‘THESE ARE THE MEN THAT DEVISE MISCHIEF.’

ISHMAEL turned his back upon the Imperial wood with its villas and gardens and its three broad avenues. The triumphal arch was all aglow with the western sunlight. The lawns and flowers, the foliage and fountains of the Champs Élysées were all steeped in the same golden light. The train of carriages was still rolling on, eastward, westward; these back to the city, those out to the wood, carrying happy idle people to dine *à fresco* at the restaurant by the cascade. The footways were crowded with pedestrians; the toy-shops, and sweet-shops, and open-air Alcazar, the Pavilion de l’Horloge, all the singing places and pleasure haunts were beginning to glitter with lamps, even in the midst of that golden light. Children were playing, organs grinding, flowers breathing perfume, clouds of dust shining like a golden haze, a world of gladness and sunset glory.

Ishmael walked at a brisk pace through the

crowd, looking neither to the right nor the left, hardly conscious of the gaiety around him, the throng of passers-by. His eyes were fixed, looking steadily in front of him, yet unseeing. He was very pale, and his brows were set in a line that meant sternest resolve.

Yes, he had spoken. He had told the loveliest, the proudest, the most exquisite of women, that it was not for him to aspire to her hand. He had told that one woman whom he passionately loved that it was for him to stand aloof from her; that even were she tempted to stoop from her dazzling height of pride and beauty so low as to crown him with her love, he could not accept the blessing and the glory. His fate was fixed, a destiny of loneliness, and self-sacrifice.

What else could he have done? he asked himself this evening in the sundown, as he threaded the crowd, now across the broad place of fountains and statues, by symbolic Strasbourg, a marble maiden, with a coronet of towers, to be crowned and garlanded later by a frantic, crowd, swearing to fight and fall for her, and anon to be veiled in sables—an emblem of shame and of mourning,—past the Tuileries, the chestnut groves, under which children were flying bright-coloured balloons—the shining windows,

the gilded railings, while yonder, across the river, shone the golden dome of the soldiers' hospital, whence came beat of drum, and blare of trumpet sounding the *retraite*. Ishmael moved athwart the familiar scene without seeing it, and walked at a still faster pace along the rue de Rivoli under the shadow of the Louvre.

What else could he have done but declare his resolve never to marry,—he whose runaway wife might be living still, might come forth from her hiding-place to claim him on his wedding day, were he weak enough to wed again without due evidence of her death. He had had no such evidence yet, though he had taken considerable trouble to obtain it: and he might have hugged himself in the belief that since Pâquerette had given no sign of her existence during the last seven years she must needs be dead. Were she living and in poverty, she would most likely have asked for aid from his wealth; were she living and prosperous she would surely have been more easily traced. His search for the betrayer had been as earnest as his search for the victim, but neither quest had succeeded. This was how he had argued the question in his own mind over and over again, and yet the thing was all dark to him, and he told himself

that as a man of honour he was forbidden to marry. He was still the husband of Pâquerette.

And to marry *her*, Constance Danetree, at such a hazard, to sully her proud and pure name by doubtful nuptials—no, *that* he could not do. Better to suffer the anguish of resigning her—better to bear his own lonely lot to the end.

He followed the rue de Rivoli as far as the Palais Royal, and thence struck into the rue St. Honoré, along which busy thoroughfare, brightening already with lamplit shop windows, he made his way to that still busier quarter of Paris which lies around the great glass pavilions of the central markets, and the old, old *Pointe St. Eustache*, historic ground, where once the swollen soil of the cemetery of the Innocents seethed and rankled with the rotting dead, and sent forth its plague-poison to slay the living; where the heaped-up coffins, thrust one above another, crammed and gorged the loathsome earth, until by the very weight of its putrid burden it burst the wall of an adjacent dwelling-house, and scared the occupant by the spectacle of a cellar filled with the ghastly relics of the dead.

At a corner of the rue Pirouette Ishmael entered a low dark wine-shop, where half-a-dozen blouses sat drinking and smoking in the dim

light. He nodded to the woman at the counter, passed through the shop, and went up a winding staircase in the corner.

A man stopped him at the top of the stairs. ‘*Es tu solide ?*’ he asked.

‘*Jusqu’à la rue de Jerusalem,*’ replied Ishmael, and passed on to a large room on the first floor, whence came the sound of a resonant voice, and a dense cloud of rank tobacco.

He pushed open the door and went in. The room was crowded with men of all ages, and by their aspect of almost every trade and profession; men in blouses and men in broad-cloth; bronzed and rugged men who work with their hands; pallid weaklings who work with their brains. The blouses and weather-tanned faces predominated in number and bulk; but the pallid brows and the well-worn frock-coats were the stronger influence.

These were the speakers, the dreamers, the enthusiasts—the Utopians who believed that this Society of the Cercle du Prolo, founded in 1831 under another name, now about to be affiliated with the International, was to bring about that socialist millennium of equal fortunes, of direct legislation by the people, of which French workmen have been thinking ever since they learned how to think.

Thirteen years ago Ishmael had been a voice of power in a certain secret society called La Loque, out of which had been developed this club of the Prolo. He had been on the side of temperance, thrift, moderation—all those virtues which make the artizan class strong in the land. He had been popular when he was a journeyman toiler like the majority, and wore a blouse, which was only ever so much cleaner than the normal blouse. The time came when he wore a coat, and was known to be a rich man employing others to work for him. Then his popularity began to wane. His moderation was called half-heartedness, his loyalty to the old ideas was doubted, and his strong common-sense, which saw both sides of every question, was denounced as the craven spirit of the bourgeois, who thrives and fattens upon the sweat of other men's brows.

He spoke, and spoke bravely, bore the brunt of his old comrades' disfavour, bearded the lion of Socialism in his den; showed his friends where they were unwise, where they asked too much of the State and of their masters: but a time came when he was saluted with a storm of groans and hisses, when his success was cast in his face as a reproach and a disgrace—when he was accused of underhand dealings, falsehood, dis-

honesty even. He flung these vile insinuations back upon his accusers, challenged them to show a single stain upon his career, and shook the dust of the club from his feet. And now to-night he came to his old place, after an interval of years, summoned by a circular which had been sent to him in common with all the other Prolos, to invite discussion as to the proposed affiliation of the club to the great International Society, founded in 1862, encouraged by the favour of the Emperor himself, and already a mighty force in civilised Europe.

The meeting of to-night was a feverish one. There were some among the Prolos who resented the loss of their own individuality, the lessening of their own importance, which must needs follow this amalgamation of the old and small society with the new and great one. These cockle-shells did not care to lose their own sense of importance by being enrolled in a fleet of three-masters. Whelmed in the great whirlpool of European Democracy, this little club of Parisian orators would be as a handful of hazel-nuts flung into the Horseshoe Fall.

There were some who dreaded this loss of individuality for vanity's sake, others who shrank from it for principle's sake; and who revolted

against the iron discipline, the mechanical drill involved in the Karl-Marxian theory of Socialism, and amongst these latter was Ishmael.

He who had not crossed the threshold of that room for seven years came there to-night to protest against the contemplated change. He stood in the group by the doorway, unnoticed and unknown, until the speaker had finished, and then he quietly shouldered his way through the crowd and advanced to the tribune. He took off his hat and faced the assembly, taller by half a head than the majority—a man of men.

Dressed as he had dressed for the review, in a coat of finest cloth and newest fashion, with the gardenia which he had put in his button-hole in the rue Castiglione, remembering how Lady Constance Danetree had worn those white waxen blossoms on her bosom on each occasion of their meeting, plainly and soberly clad withal, with the air of statesman and thinker rather than of fribble or fop—yet the look of him as he stood before them in the flush and power of his manhood set the teeth of those keen democrats on edge. This was the capitalist, the ‘bourgeois,’ the hated one, the employer of labour, the man who wallowed in

wealth which represented the sweat of other men’s brows.

An angry murmur ran round the crowded room like the faint rumbling of distant thunder, and then a solitary hiss, sharp, venomous, flew out at him like a forked tongue, seemed to quiver in the air, and then to strike straight at his breast.

‘I am not afraid of your hisses, friends!’ he said, ‘but I am sorry for your want of sense. I am not here to plead the cause of capital against labour, the rights of the employer as against the rights of the employed. That is an old question which we have argued before to-night. I am here to protest against the amalgamation of this little honest-hearted society with the most pernicious and fatal association which ever threatened the peace of civilised Europe.’

This was a bold attack; for in 1867 the International was in the flower of its youth. There had been a congress of workmen of all nations at Geneva; there was to be a congress at Lausanne in September. The International was on the side of universal peace: it promised a millennium for the working man and the world at large; it offered a dazzling prospect of equal rights; the abolition of wages in favour of co-operation; the redemption of woman from the

necessity of labour ; free education, universal enlightenment. For the old-established journey-men's tour of France, for the German *wanderjahr*, was to be substituted the tour of Europe, enlarging the ideas of the mechanic by contact with foreign nations.

The International had so far acted with moderation, for while sustaining the metal-workers in their long strike, and while putting upon its black books every firm which dismissed any member of the Society, it had lifted up its voice boldly against the workmen at Roubaix when they destroyed their machinery and set fire to their workshops.

So far the Society seemed to have acted only for good ; but behind the association of many men Ishmael saw the working of one mind, and that the mind of a dangerous visionary. He saw the shadow of German despotism, a despotism of the socialist as perilous as the despotism of the monarch : and it was against this that he spoke.

He denounced Karl Marx and his theories, he indicated the dangers they involve, demonstrated their falsehood, their impossibility. The majority of his hearers knew little or nothing about Karl Marx and his system, but they were

most of them prejudiced against an old comrade who had grown rich. Ishmael represented the Patron, the Bourgeois, the Enemy. His speech provoked a storm of hisses, groans, abuse. But the full sonorous voice thundered on, every sentence coming with the force of a sledge-hammer. Dauntless and undaunted he stood before them to the last, till he had said his ultimate word; then with a smile, half friendly, half scornful, he bowed to his auditors, amongst whom but a small minority were in his favour, put on his hat and left the room.

It was past nine when he went out into the network of old streets, and the illuminated dial of St. Eustache shone pale in the summer twilight. The year was at that lovely season when night is almost unknown. The old streets of Paris had a dusky look in the grey even-tide, but they were not yet dark.

Ishmael had left the club about ten minutes, when a man close behind him said in a low confidential voice :

'Has Monsieur Ishmael forgotten an old member of the Cercle du Prolo, whom he once employed in a delicate matter?'

Ishmael turned quickly, and recognised a man who had been made known to him thirteen

years ago as a member of that semi-professional fraternity which ferrets out domestic secrets—the police of private life—and who had been his agent in the endeavour to find Pâquerette. The man had travelled half over France upon that quest, had spent a good deal of his employer's money, without arriving at any successful result. He had been apparently on the scent many times, had brought back information that seemed genuine, but the end was failure: and after paying him from first to last a considerable sum, Ishmael had dismissed him seven years ago, very much disposed to think him an impostor.

And now this same man, whom he had not seen for years, but of whom, by a strange coincidence, he had been thinking within the last two hours — this man, Dumont, stood before him in the June twilight, breathing *absinthe*, and clothed from head to foot with shabbiness.

It seemed to Ishmael as if the man had sprung out of the very paving stones in answer to his own thought—had risen from the ground at his bidding, like an evil spirit at the touch of a necromancer's wand. He had despised the man for his profligate habits in years gone by, respect-

ing him just a little at the same time for his cleverness. He had treated him with a certain familiarity and good fellowship, as between men of the same opinions, linked by the same brotherhood. But the gulf between them had widened since that time. It was within the last seven years that Ishmael had allowed himself to be tempted into society, had taken the place to which his wealth and his talents entitled him. And while Ishmael had taken a higher position, the man Dumont had sunk to a lower grade—the grade of the shirtless and houseless—the lost tribes of Paris, whose children sleep under bridges and in shadowy doorways, who eat garbage, and whose life is a perpetual game of hide-and-seek with the police.

He was a strange-looking man, this Dumont—strange because, despite his threadbare coat and greasy hat, his absence of linen, and frouzy neckerchief—despite the traces of drunkenness and debauchery, too palpable in the tallowy tints of the soddened face, the inflamed eyelids, and purple lips—despite the livery of vice, the creature looked as if once, in some remote period of life, he had been a gentleman. He held himself like a gentleman; he had the intonation of a gentleman; he had the arched instep, the well-

cut features, the lean tapering hand and wrist of a gentleman. For the rest he was so squalid and so sickly a spectacle as he stood there in the cold grey light, that he might be taken for a man who had died and been buried, and had been dug out of the common grave, to be galvanized into a factitious life by some kind of scientific jugglery.

‘What do you know of the Prols?’ asked Ishmael contemptuously.

‘What do I not know? I have been one of them for six and thirty years. I was one of them—ay, and a leading light, too—at the foundation of the society in ’31, when the workmen of Paris began to discover that the glorious revolution of July did not mean Socialism, that they were no better off under the King of the French than they had been under the King of France, when that great reservoir of humanity the faubourg Saint-Antoine began to grow ruffled and stormy. In those days the Prolétaires were a little band of men who met once a week in a wine-shop, in the rue Sainte-Marguerite, and who called themselves the *Société de la Loque*. “*La loque en avant*” was their war-cry. I was a speaker, then, Monsieur Ishmael;—yes, by heaven, as eloquent an orator as you were to-night. I have always

been true to my colours; I am true to them now. It is you who are false, Monsieur Ishmael; you who have grown rich under the rule of a despot and have left off caring for the cause of liberty.’

‘This is no place for talking politics,’ said Ishmael. ‘You had better come to my house in the Place Royale two hours hence, and I will talk as much as you like. You look poor, Dumont.’

‘It would be very strange if I looked rich.’

‘Well, I may be able to give you some profitable employment, perhaps. You may as well dine or sup in the meantime.’

‘It will be at least a novel sensation,’ answered the man called Dumont, accepting Ishmael’s napoleon.

Two hours later the man was ushered into Ishmael’s library in the Place Royale, a spacious panelled room, furnished with heavy oak book-cases, solid oak chairs, and an immense office table covered with papers, plans, and drawings, and lighted by two large shaded lamps.

‘Sit down,’ said Ishmael, pointing to an arm-chair by the empty hearth. ‘You told me yonder, two hours ago, that I was false to the cause of my fellow-workmen. I tell you that I am as true to that cause now that I am a rich

man as ever I was as a poor man. But I do not give in my adherence to Karl Marx and his crew.'

'You had better,' answered the other, drily. 'They are coming to the front.'

'I am no collectivist.'

'No, you are a rich man: you are a capitalist; you believe in your divine right to profit by other men's labour, to wallow in accumulated capital—which is only another name for unpaid labour—to heap up a colossal fortune by the help of other men's thews and sinews.'

'I have not spared my own labour of head or hand. There might have been neither work nor wages for those other men if my enterprise had not set the ball rolling.'

'No; but you have made millions, and they are exactly where they were before the ball began to roll,' answered the man. 'That's what Karl Marx and his crew want to put an end to—the aggregation of profits in the pockets of one man. Why should the keystone of the arch be a diamond and all the other stones only common stone?'

'Perhaps because without the keystone the arch would tumble to pieces.'

'Ah! but we shall construct all future arches on a better principle. Every great enterprise shall

be undertaken by a body of men, each risking his labour, each reaping an equal share of the profits. Every manufactory shall be carried on by the operatives. Wealth shall be distributed.’

‘Utopian!’ interrupted Ishmael. ‘The universe itself was formed from a nucleus. There must be a beginning—there must be a master-mind—there must be rich men and poor men—under Empire or Republic. Make all men equal at sunrise, and at sundown there would be differences. And, again, that concentration of capital, of which you Socialists complain, is, after all, the great bond of union. In co-operative labour the individual risks would not be large enough to ensure that intensity of purpose without which there can be no success in trade. The capitalist takes gigantic risks and works harder than any of his men. If there come the menace of ruin, it is he who must face the dark hour, grapple with the danger and overcome it. Would a herd of men, held together by the vague chances of divided profits—never sure of their bread—meet misfortune as bravely or work as earnestly? I think not. But I did not ask you here to talk political economy. I want you to work for me again, as you worked for me some years ago.’

‘To resume my hunt for your wife?’

‘Yes. I want to know where she is, if she

still lives. I want the evidence of her death, if she is dead.'

'Difficult rather. When I came upon the trace of her at Marseilles, a singer at a *café-chantant* near the Quay, she had changed her name three times. She had made her *début* at Brussels in opera as Mademoiselle Callogne; she had acted with a strolling company as Madame Sévry; she appeared at Marseilles as Bonita—nothing but that, Bonita, or la Bonita. She was a star in the little company at the *café-chantant*, a favourite with an audience which consisted chiefly of seamen, mariners of all nations and of all colours—a frightful hole! Your wife had left Marseilles when I discovered her identity with this Mademoiselle Bonita, a discovery which, as you may remember, I only made through tracing Hector de Valnois—no easy matter, for he had sunk pretty low by that time, this sprig of a noble house,' with infinite scorn.

'And they had left Marseilles in a steamer for Valparaiso a week before you got there! You employed an agent in that city to hunt them down, but without avail,' interrupted Ishmael, impatiently. 'Why go over old ground?'

'I am only picking up the threads, in order to make a fresh start,' answered the other. 'Let me see, Monsieur Ishmael, it was six years after

Madame ran away from you that I heard of her at Marseilles, and this Monsieur de Valnois had been faithful to her all that time—through good and evil fortune. There was something very real in their passion, you see. It survived empty pockets, hard fare, the ups and downs of a Bohemian career. Monsieur earned a little money by his pen, Madame a little by her pretty voice. Sometimes one was ill, sometimes both were penniless. It was not a path of roses. But they were true to each other all those years.’

‘I did not invite you to be eloquent upon their fidelity. You heard of my wife’s intended voyage to Valparaiso. You never traced her beyond the steamer that was to take her there. I want you to take up the thread you dropped then——’

‘After seven years. It will not be easy. Strange that you should be indifferent to Madame’s fate all these years, and suddenly awaken to an eager interest in it. Forgive my frankness; I speak as Prolo to Prolo.’

‘Life is full of strangeness, but you need not concern yourself about my motives. Find my wife for me, or bring me the evidence of her death, and I will give you five thousand francs, over and above the salary you will draw from me while you are employed in the quest.’

‘And my expenses? They will be stiff. I see no better way of beginning than by going to Valparaiso. Where the local police failed, a man bred in Paris may succeed. I ought to have gone there seven years ago—only your interest in the chase seemed to have cooled just then.’

‘I was wearied by failure. I trusted to the chapter of accidents. I thought that if she were penniless, deserted, she would come to me of her own accord for aid, for shelter—come to me as the hare winds back to her form, as her unhappy mother went to that wretched den in the rue Sombreuil.’

He said this in a low voice, to himself rather than to Dumont.

The ex-police agent looked at him curiously, with keenly-questioning eyes.

‘The rue Sombreuil!’ he echoed. ‘Did your wife’s mother ever live in the rue Sombreuil?’

‘She was born there, and died there in the flower of her youth—a withered flower, cut down untimely. Why do you stare, man? I never pretended that my wife was of good birth. I only told you that she was a pure and innocent woman till that false friend of mine corrupted her. She was a daughter of the people, poor child. Her mother was a *grisette*, who ran

away with some nameless scoundrel; her grandfather was an *ibiniste*, called Lemoine, a drunken rascal who lived from hand to mouth. Strange that so fair a flower should have come from so foul a seed! My wife had the air and the instincts of a lady. Who shall say that these things are hereditary?’

‘She may have had good blood on the father’s side,’ said the other, thoughtfully. ‘Do you know anything about her father?’

‘Only that he was a villain. Enough of the past: it is too full of pain and bitterness for me to be fond of talking about it. Find me my wife, if you can. You know the reward.’

‘That reward would be the same for the evidence of her death?’ asked the other, with a faint sneer. ‘You will give as much for bad news as for good?’

‘As much for one as for the other. I pay for certainty.’

CHAPTER III.

‘AND THE GREAT MAN HUMBLETH HIMSELF.’

MANY young women in the matrimonial hunting-field would have given up the chase on the strength of such a protest as that made by Ishmael, when in grave and deliberate accents he declared his determination to live and die a bachelor; but that ardent young sportswoman, Amélie Jarzé, was not so easily put off the scent. She was discouraged, disheartened, vexed, and angry—jealous of Lady Constance Danetree’s superior influence; but she did not despair. She talked the subject over with her sister Hortense during one of those oases of friendly feeling which sometimes diversified the arid desert of sisterly antagonism.

‘There must be something queer in his past life,’ said the damsel, when she had described that little episode at the five o’clock tea;—‘a low intrigue, a low marriage even. He had such a gloomy air when he said that he should never marry—not the air of a man who does not wish

to marry, but of a man who dare not marry. There is a secret, I am certain. How strange that people should know so little about his antecedents. I have questioned everybody as far as I could venture; but they all tell the same story—a workman, living among herds of other workmen out at Belleville—till seven years ago, when he burst upon Paris like a meteor. He had a hand in all the improvements in Algiers. The Emperor decorated him after the completion of a great railway bridge somewhere in Auvergne; and then people found out that he was one of the greatest practical engineers of the age, and immensely rich, which was much more to the purpose; and then everybody began to ask him to dinner. Of his private life before that time people in society seem to know actually nothing.’

‘Why should they know anything?’ asked Hortense, with a supercilious air. ‘What is a workman’s private life?—breakfast and dinner, and a bath on Sunday.’

‘I want to know if he was married or single in those days.’

‘I am told that Parisian workmen rarely marry,’ said Hortense, placidly.

It was in vain that Amélie speculated and wondered. She was no nearer arriving at any

certainly as to the motive of Ishmael's declaration. But she was determined not to relinquish the chase upon account of that assertion of his. After all it might mean little or nothing—a mere expression of egotism, intended to enhance the importance of the speaker.

‘I suppose he thinks we are all dying for him,’ she said to herself.

She wrote him a little note on the next Wednesday—the dearest little note on the last fashionable paper, with a painted swallow in the corner—a note in an elegant slanting penmanship, *à l’Anglaise*, to remind him of Madame Jarzé’s Thursdays, which he had so long forgotten. A postscript informed him that Lady Constance Danetree had promised to put in an appearance early, and that Mademoiselle Betsy, who had created a furor at a café-concert in the faubourg du Temple, was to sing her famous song, ‘Decrochez moi ça,’ the song she had lately had the honour of singing at the Tuileries before a cluster of crowned heads, and as a reward for which a costly bracelet had been clasped upon her wrist by the Imperial fingers.

Even the temptation thus held out did not attract Ishmael to the second floor in the Champs Élysées. He replied politely to Mademoiselle

Jarzé's letter, informing her that the numerous public works in which he was interested kept him closely occupied, and rendered visiting and all social pleasures impossible for him. There was a tone of decision about this letter which made even Amélie feel that the case was hopeless.

'There is somebody or someone in the background,' she said to herself; 'and the man cannot marry. Well, as he evidently doesn't want to marry me, I'm very glad he is not able to marry Lady Constance Danetree.'

Amélie was angry, chagrined, disappointed, but she was not the kind of young person to cut off her back hair, or clothe herself in sack-cloth because of her disappointment, especially in the year of an International Exhibition, when Paris, the capital of universal pleasures, was at its best and gayest. So, failing the keen rapture of the chase, with Ishmael for her quarry, she was fain to get what amusement she could out of the easy admirers within her reach.

Chief and most favoured among these was Armand de Kératry, the young man who had in his own estimation, reached the climax of literary fame when he saw his first vaudeville produced with success at the Palais Royal

From that hour he lived only to write vaudevilles. Waking and sleeping his mind laboured upon jokes and couplets, critical concatenations in the family circle, foolish or jealous husbands, giddy wives, amusingly treacherous friends. He liked Amélie, chiefly because she was of the Palais Royal type. She was his lay figure—the model for his giddy young wives and foolish virgins. He reproduced her impertinences, her unconscious, or affectedly unconscious, *double-entendres*, accentuated with the heightened colouring of the theatre. He courted her society, was rarely missing from one of Madame Jarzé's Thursdays, albeit other *gandins* of his class affected to despise those functions. He was to be seen and heard whispering and giggling in a corner with Amélie; while Madame Jarzé provided there were no more eligible man present was amiably unconscious of their little indiscretions.

‘They have known each other so long, foolish children,’ she explained; ‘they are like brother and sister.’

As a successful playwright, on friendly terms with other playwrights, Monsieur de Kératry got occasional admissions for one of the theatres which were not filled to overflowing, and these he

presented to Madame Jarzé, thus keeping Amélie *au courant* of that lighter dramatic art in which he hoped to distinguish himself. Amélie soon acquired the knowingness of an experienced *cabotine*, and was eager to help her admirer with suggestions and inventions of her own active little brain. Pleased with her interest in his work, he brought his new vaudeville in his pocket when he dropped in for an extempore ‘five o’clock’ of weak tea and neapolitan biscuits *chez* Madame Jarzé, having first refreshed himself with a *polichinelle* of vermouth or curaçoa at that much gayer ‘five o’clock’ *chez* Madame Arnould, on the *entre-sol*. He read his last scene to Amélie in a little nook apart by the open window, and they laughed over his rather racy jokes together in good fellowship. Armand treated the damsel altogether *en bon garçon*, and did not apologise for the somewhat hazardous situations in his play.

Having laughed over the final scene, she was eager to know when the new piece was to be produced.

‘Not for ages,’ replied Kératry. ‘It has to go to the *teinturier* first, to be remodelled: that man has a knowledge of stage effects which I shall never acquire. It is as much an instinct as the

result of long experience in dramatic criticism. He will pull all these scenes to pieces—cut out hundreds of my happiest lines—introduce half-a-dozen hackneyed situations, and make the thing actable. It is a humiliating process to undergo; but it answered with my first play, and I hope it may answer with my second.'

'I don't believe anybody in Paris can know more about dramatic effect than you,' said Amélie, making her blue eyes as big as possible, and favouring Armand with a look of childlike worship which she had hitherto reserved for Ishmael. 'How I should like to see this *teinturier*,' she added, with a touch of frivolity. 'He must be such a curious person.'

'He is a curious person, and lives in a curious den, and wears a curious coat,' answered Armand, 'but he is a kind of eccentricity that is uncommonly common in Paris—the eccentricity of hard-up-ishness, *l'homme dans la déche*.'

'Ah!' sighed Amélie, 'that is not an unknown complaint even in the Champs Elysées, and I think we get it in a severer form on this side of the Seine, because we have to keep up appearances. But I should so like to see this poor Monsieur——'

'Nimporte—that is the name he has

given himself, Jean Nimporte. But if he is the author of *Mes Nuits Blanches*, as I have been told he is, his real name is de Valnois, and he comes of a good Provençal family. He encourages no inquiries as to his antecedents, and never talks of his past life. He smokes like a factory chimney, and I believe he is softening his brains with a continual course of *absinthe*. I am really sorry for him; one can see that he was once a gentleman.’

‘Do bring him here some day.’

‘Bring him here! Impossible! He seldom goes out till after dark—he has not a presentable coat belonging to him; and if I were to offer to give him one he would throw it out on the landing, like that English philosopher you may have read of, who threw away a pair of new boots which benevolence left at his door when he was a penniless collegian. You can do nothing for a fallen angel like Jean Nimporte.’

‘The more you say about him the more do I languish to see him,’ exclaimed Amélie.

‘Nothing easier, if you are the *bon garçon* I take you for.’

‘I am always *bon garçon* with you.’

‘Then I will introduce you to my *teinturier* to-morrow. Tell Madame that you are going to

spend the morning with Lady Constance Danetree. She will hardly object to your going so short a distance alone; or if you must go under convoy of your *bonne*, leave the *bonne* at Lady Constance's gate, and wait for me in the shrubbery. I will be on the watch, and will join you directly the coast is clear. I shall have a fly waiting, and I will carry you off to the Quartier Latin, where you shall see life. We will breakfast together at one of the students' restaurants, on the Boul Mich.'

'Boul Mich?'

'Boulevard St. Michel — popular contraction, that's all; and after breakfast we will go and see Jean Nimporte.'

'But it will be dreadful—to go out alone with you——'

'A friend you have known almost from childhood!'

'To breakfast with you at a restaurant——'

'One must eat when one is hungry. Come, Amélie, you know you can trust me.'

'With all my heart. But the world! What would people say if they saw us together?'

'Only that you have the courage of your opinions, like those charming girls from New York, who are not afraid to be their own chape-

rons. The most innocent girls are always the boldest. Remember Una. Besides, you can keep your veil down.’

‘I will come,’ said Amélie, with a radiant smile; ‘and I shall not wear a veil. I have the courage of my opinions, and one of those opinions is a perfect belief in you.’

This was a master stroke. Monsieur de Kératry was enchanted. The girl’s frankness, the spice of adventure that flavoured the whole thing, the flattery implied in her confidence, all gratified that vanity which is the ruling passion alike of fool and wise man.

At eleven o’clock next morning, Amélie announced her intention of spending the day with Lady Constance Danetree. They had met at a reception the night before, and there was no reason why such an engagement should not have been made between them: so maternal suspicions were in no wise excited. There was a slight discussion as to whether Amélie could or could not go so far as the other side of the Arch without escort; but as Monsieur Jarzé had gone to his office, and the *bonne’s* services were urgently required indoors, it was finally decided that she could.

Amélie dressed herself with a dainty simplicity, which became her better than her finest

feathers. A holland frock, prettily made, and fresh from the laundress, a knot or two of scarlet ribbon to relieve the neutral tint of the frock, a little brown straw toque, with a bunch of scarlet berries, a holland parasol, and long Swede gloves, at a time when long gloves were a distinction.

‘You are simply perfect,’ exclaimed Kératry, meeting her just beyond the Arch, in the broad sunny space, whence diverge the avenues of the Parisian wood. ‘But I hope you don’t think you look like a *grisette*, or even a *petite bourgeoise*, *par exemple*. I never saw you appear so distinguished.’

He had a hired Victoria in waiting, into which he handed his companion, a little frightened, in spite of her audacity, at the tremendous impropriety she was about to commit, and expecting to see an acquaintance in every passer-by. She had no veil, but happily she had her large holland sunshade, and under that shelter she felt she was comparatively safe. The Victoria drove quickly along the Avenue de l’Alma, and across the bridge of the same name, past the Champs de Mars, across the Place des Invalides, and into the long sober rue de Grenelle; thence, by streets unknown to Amélie, to the square in front of St. Sulpice, and then into a labyrinth of nar-

row streets, which were as a new world to the adventurous maiden.

‘I am not going to take you to the Boul. Mich. for breakfast,’ said Armand; ‘it is too glaring and public. I am going to show you one of the oldest students’ haunts in Paris,’—antiquity in Paris usually meaning something under half a century—‘a place that was famous in the days of the Restoration, the Pantagrue.’

‘What a queer name,’ said Amélie, whose knowledge of even the nomenclature of old French literature was of the smallest.

The carriage stopped in front of a dingy-looking house in a dingy-looking street, and, for the first time in her life, Mademoiselle Jarzé was introduced to a popular *café*, a haunt of the student and the Bohemian. It was even a stranger scene than she had expected to behold.

The Pantagrue had changed curiously since those days when Louis-Philippe was at the beginning of his reign, and when Père Lemoine went thither to seek tidings of his lost daughter. It had been then a dingy and sufficiently commonplace establishment, consisting of two large low-ceiled rooms opening one into the other, furnished with numerous small tables, and boasting in the outer apartment a pewter-covered counter or bar, behind

which the mistress of the house sat all day, and through the greater part of the night, enthroned among many-coloured bottles and glasses, and with, perchance, a few bunches of cheap flowers, making a central point of vivid colour amidst the pervading dulness.

Now, as in those days, the floor of the Pantagruel was sunk below the level of the street, and one descended to it by a stone step; now, as in the past, the outward aspect of this place of entertainment was darksome and uninviting; but, heavens, what a change within!

The Pantagruel had caught the spirit of the times. That passion for luxury and decorative art which was the leading note of the Empire had seized upon this students' *café*. The Pantagruel had caught the fever of romanticism, mediævalism, Victor-Hugo-ism. The Pantagruel had become a page out of the book of the good old times, a house in which Villon himself might have drunk deep out of a whistle-tankard, and trolled his roundelays to an admiring circle, whose sword-hilts clinked in chorus to the poet's glad refrain. The Pantagruel had gone in for 'culture.'

The walls were rich in old tapestry, and older Rouen pottery. Brass chandeliers and Gothic lanterns hung from the heavily-bossed ceiling.

Each room had its fine old carved oak mantle-piece—its floreated iron dogs; whilst in the corner reposed pikes and lances, that seemed as if only just put aside by some deep-drinking warrior of the Middle Ages, steel-clad from head to heel.

The discordant notes in this mediæval interior were the mahogany tables, and a piano in front of the counter; but this latter anachronism was pardoned for the sake of conviviality when the Bohemians of literature and art met in these halls at eventide to criticise and anathematise those rival runners who had outstripped them in the race of life. Here assembled the brigade of the threadbare coats and the shabby hats, the ragged regiment of culture and wit, the *Râtés*—the men who might have done so much better in this world if they had *not* been geniuses.

In the dim Rembrandt gloom of this strange scene, lighted only by stained-glass casements, Amélie gazed and wondered. She had expected shabbiness, squalor even; and, behold, she was in a chamber that might have been the banquet hall of one of the old prince-nobles of France, at Blois or Plessy les Tours. Never out of the Louvre or the Hotel de Cluny had she seen such richness of decoration, such brass and iron work, or such quaint pottery.

It was happily an hour at which most of the students were engaged in their colleges and hospitals, and when very few of the *Râtés* were up; so Kératry and his companion had the mediæval refectory all to themselves. He chose a table in the embrasure of one of the painted windows, and placed Amélie with her back to the room, so that, had it been ever so full, that pretty little *frimousse chiffonnée* of hers would not have been revealed to the public, save in taking her departure.

Arnaud ordered a bottle of champagne as an accompaniment to a delicate little *déjeuner*, which was served quickly and well, and which Amélie declared was even nicer than anything she had ever eaten at the Maison Dorée or the Café Riche, whither she had been invited on occasion to some festive banquet before the opera, given by wealthy friends of her father—those good Samaritans of the upper classes, who seemed sent into the world to spend their money upon feeding the hungry with dinners at two napoleons a head.

She protested at first against the creaming champagne, vowed she would take nothing but coffee, or chocolate, but relented on seeing the primrose tinted wine breathe a cold dew upon the

tall Flemish goblet, and owned that it was nice, because it was so deliciously cool.

‘You must help me with the bottle,’ said Armand, ‘or I shall have to drink it all myself, and then I shall sink unconscious under the table, and you will have to pay the bill.’

‘That would be quite out of the question,’ said Amélie, whose poor little purse was always empty. ‘I should have to stay here in pledge.’

‘You see your danger, so you had better do your duty.’

Amélie did her duty, to the extent of one of those tall glasses of pale perfumed liquor, sipped daintily during the progress of the meal. It was a warm morning, towards the close of June, and the iced champagne was not unpleasant. Kératry finished the bottle with ease. They dawdled a little over their wood strawberries and black coffee; the gentleman paid the bill, which the lady thought absurdly small; and then they strolled away from the Pantagruel. The Victoria had been dismissed when they alighted.

‘What a dear quiet old place, this Pantagruel,’ said Amélie.

‘Very. Do you know, child, that in ’32 this quiet old place was the headquarters of Socialism. The *émeute* of that year was half hatched here.’

Amélie's mind was not historical. She knew there had been a revolution, and a good many heads cut off in '93. The fact had been made familiar to her in various novels and dramas. She knew there had been a disturbance called a Coup d'Etat, and some unpleasantness, when she was in the nursery; but here her knowledge ceased.

They went into a long narrow street, somewhere at the back of the Luxembourg—a street of malodorous gutters, and shabby miscellaneous houses, with hardly a window or a roof alike, the antipodes of the white uniformity, the classic monotone of that Haussmann-ised Paris which she knew so well, a street of wine-shops and *gargotes* and humble *crémeries*. It was in this evil-smelling region that the *teinturier* had his abode.

Kératry stopped at a narrow dirty-looking door, and led the way into a dark passage, with an atmosphere pervaded by the concentrated essence of stale cabbage, the reek of an everlasting *pot-au-feu*, a soup-kettle that was always brewing, and which went down from father to son without solution of continuity, like a West-Indian pepper-pot that has been in the family for generations.

‘What a horrid den!’ cried Amélie, smothering her nostrils in a perfumed handkerchief.

The stairs were worse than the passage, and seemed endless.

Jean Nimpoite lived on the floor just under the steep gabled roof; but to Amélie it appeared as if that fifth floor were the twentieth, and that they were ascending the tower of Babel; all the more so because every voice she heard on her way, through doors ajar, or bawling from the obscurity of the staircase, seemed to speak a different *patois*, or a different language.

‘WHAT is this awful place?’ she asked at last, breathless, panting, on the fifth story, where the landing, with its low smoke-blackened ceiling and one small window, was wrapped in perpetual gloom.

‘*Un garni*,’ answered her guide coolly. ‘I dare say it is a revelation to you. You would hardly conceive, out of your inner consciousness what a cheap Parisian lodging-house could be like.

‘I could never imagine anything so dreadful,’ said Amélie, with conviction.

‘Ah, you would have to descend a good many lower circles before you reached the bottom of the pit. This is a *bourgeois* caravansera—the abode of the struggling, the decayed, the respectable. Wait till you see real squalor, real dirt, real misery. Here the graces of life may be

wanting, but the decencies are still cared for—in some wise.’

‘Not in the matter of odours,’ protested Amélie, still protecting her nose; ‘the smell of this staircase is positively sickening.’

‘Ah, the atmosphere is always the first thing to suffer.’

‘And you really come here—often—to see this person?’ said Amélie, wonderingly, as they waited at Jean Nimporte’s door.

‘As often as I want him. He has the pride of Lucifer, and won’t come to me.’

A voice called ‘Come in,’ and Kératry turned the handle of the door, and entered, Amélie lingering in the background, half afraid to follow.

‘Good morning, friend: I have brought a little cousin to see you—I suppose you have no objection?’ Kératry began cheerily.

‘If the lady does not object to the hole I live in, I do not object to the lady,’ answered the literary hack.

His voice was husky, like the voice of a man whose lungs were injured by drink and tobacco; but his tone was the tone of a gentleman, and he rose, meerschaum in hand, to greet his visitors. He was haggard and thin, with lank fair hair streaked with grey, tangled beard, pale cadaverous com-

plexion, eyes round which care had dug deep hollows, and painted purple shadows. He had once been handsome, or at least refined and interesting. His bony figure stooped a little, and was clad in a loose dressing-gown, which had once been fine, but which long service had reduced to the colour of a withered chestnut leaf that has lain for a week in the gutter. His hands were the best point about him; but their transparent pallor savoured too much of disease and death. Amélie, who had no acquaintances less prosperous than herself, shrank with a thrill of terror from this human shipwreck.

‘I have brought you my last scenes,’ said Kératry. ‘You need not mind what you say before Mademoiselle. She knows I am indebted to your collaboration, though I don’t tell the world so.’

‘Why should you?’ retorted the man who called himself Jean Nimporte. ‘If your play could win Petrarch’s laurel crown, I should not ask for a leaf from the garland. All I want is to live. I have not had an idea of my own here for the last seven years,’ touching his pallid brow with pallid fingers; ‘but I can straighten another man’s weak sentences, and set them on their legs. I can prune exuberances, and pluck up weeds in the garden of fancy. And although

I have forgotten how to smile, I know how to turn a speech that will set a theatre in a roar. Will you have a glass of *purée de pois* ?'

He pointed to a bottle half full of a greenish liquor, and on Kératry refusing, poured some of the stuff into a tumbler, which he filled with water.

'Isn't it rather early for *absinthe* ?' asked his client.

'It is not too early to live, and I can't live without it,' answered Jean Nimporte.

He unrolled the manuscript, and with bent brow, and pen ready dipped in the ink, began to read. His decision and rapidity of mind were marvellous, though the hand that held the pen trembled like an aspen leaf. He erased, interlined, threw in a sentence here, a word there, slashed his ruthless pen across a whole page of dialogue, dotted in jokes as easily as another man might have put in commas. Amélie looked on open-mouthed, half indignant that her friend's work should be so roughly handled, yet impressed by this wild genius with the shaking hand and matted beard.

For nearly an hour Monsieur Nimporte worked at those concluding scenes of the new vaudeville; never relaxing the intent frown upon his haggard

brow; sipping his glass of *absinthe*; refilling his pipe with those shaky hands of his; yet working all the while. Now and again he made a radical alteration; put a husband into a cupboard to overhear a lover's declaration; brought a *soubrette* from behind a curtain at a crisis; played pitch and toss with a love-letter; manipulated the old, old machinery of the Palais Royal drama with all the dexterity of an adept.

‘I really think the thing will do,’ he said, as he approached the end. ‘I am obliged to hurry along; for I have an appointment at two o'clock with a gentleman to whose Frederick I have the honour to play Voltaire.’

‘A poet whose rhymes you retouch,’ said Kératry.

‘Retouch, yes—and occasionally remake altogether, for love of the Muses. He pays me more than you do; and he had need, for the work is harder. I was a poet myself once, and the divine flame burned fiercely enough in those days; but it is dreary work now to get a spark out of the old embers—to order. I never could work to order, Monsieur de Kératry. I should be a rich man if my Pegasus would have run in harness.’

He blew a great cloud from his old *brûle-gueule*--and sat for a minute or so motionless, his

hand lying idle on the manuscript, his eyes fixed and dreamy. So does the man look who sits amidst the wreckage of a life that might have been glorious, and glances backward along the path of folly; flower-strewn in some places, perhaps,—but, ah! how much oftener thick set with briar and nettle.

‘You expect a visitor here at two o’clock,’ said Amélie, looking alarmed. ‘Why did you not say so before? Pray let us go this instant,’ she added, turning to Kératry, and standing up, parasol in hand. ‘We may meet some one on that horrid staircase; some one whom we know.’

‘Don’t be frightened, child. Nobody in the Quartier Latin is likely to know you,’ replied Armand easily.

‘And if an acquaintance did recognise you, Mademoiselle, what then?’ asked Jean Nimporte, looking up at her with a mocking smile. ‘Is it a crime to visit the literary hermit in his cell—with your cousin?’

‘Pray come!’ pleaded Amélie, whose audacity had evaporated during the enforced quietude of the last hour.

It had been dull work, sitting playing with the handle of her parasol, listlessly contemplative of the poet’s shabby surroundings. The red tile

floor; the wretched old sofa, meant for repose, but loaded with pamphlets, papers, books, clothes—the accumulated litter of months of slovenly existence; the window opening upon a vista of roofs and chimneys, with not a leaf or a flower within sight; the distempered wall, blotched with damp, scrawled here and there with charcoal sketches in the style of Gavarni; the cobwebs in the corners of the ceiling,—altogether a dismal scene for the contemplation of a young lady accustomed to gilded cornices and damask-draped windows, commanding a bright outlook of foliage and fountains. The excitement, the flavour of novelty in her escapade had all passed off, like the bubbles upon the champagne at the Pantagruel, and she had leisure to repent of her folly, and to speculate as to what would happen to her if Madame Jarzé, by any unlucky accident, found out this freak of unchaperoned girlhood. It was not that there was any harm in the thing, but it was unusual, unallowed—an assertion of feminine liberty which might be tolerated in New York, but which would create a nine days’ wonder in the Champs ‘Elysées.

But the *teinturier’s* pen was at work again, correcting the final couplets of the vaudeville, and Armand de Kératry was for the moment

absorbed in watching that rapid pen as it played havoc with his verses.

She tapped his shoulder impatiently with her parasol. 'Pray take me home,' she said; 'don't you hear that monsieur expects a visitor? I would not be seen here by anybody for worlds!'

Too late. There was a tap at the door, left ajar, on account of the sultry mid-day heat, and a languid voice complained:

'Your staircase is the most infected hole in all Paris, my friend. It surprises me that you escape a fever.'

'*Ciel!*' gasped Amélie, in a half whisper, recognising that fashionable drawl, the concentrated essence of superciliousness; 'it is Monsieur de Poutchartrain. He must not see me. He will tell papa—mamma—Hortense. Hide me, hide me, for pity's sake!'

She looked about her wildly, like a young hind at bay, for one of those curtains, cupboards inner apartments of any kind, which are so plentiful in all vaudevilles.

There was a recess in which the literary hack kept his wardrobe, a threadbare coat and an old, old paletot, with ragged silk lining—a remnant of the time when there were Gandins upon the earth, and when he was one of them; but no

shred of drapery screened that recess. But in a corner of the room there was a ladder, which communicated with a loft above; and to this ladder Jean Nimporte pointed, grinning maliciously the while.

Amélie flew to the haven of refuge, and scrambled up the ladder, almost as quickly as a gnome in a fairy drama at the Châtelet or the Porte St. Martin. She knew not whither that old break-neck ladder would lead her; but she would have gone anywhere—on the open roof, among chimney pots, and half-starved cats, at peril of life and limb, to avoid Paul de Pontchartrain.

Armand followed her up the rickety ladder, and as they vanished from view Jean Nimporte crossed the room with a leisurely step, saying—

‘A moment, my friend, and I am with you,’ in a voice half drowned in a yawn, as of a man just awakened.

‘Were you asleep?’ asked Paul, sharply, as he entered. ‘Ah, I see, more *absinthe*, and at two o’clock in the day! Do you know that you are softening your brain a little more with every spoonful of that pernicious stuff?’

‘What does it matter? When the work of ruin is accomplished I shall have ceased to suffer. Why should a man try to preserve his thinking

faculty when thought is all pain; when memory is only a camera that shows the photograph of a fatal past; when imagination cannot conjure up a gleam of light in the future?’

‘That’s not a bad idea—a man steeping himself in *absinthe*, with the deliberate intention of blotting out his brain,’ said the little poet, excitedly. ‘You are a terrible *Réfractaire*, Valnois, but you really have first-rate ideas. Have you thrown off any suggestions for me lately?’

He drew his chair to the table, took off his gloves, and squared his elbows with a business-like air, little knowing that a pair of mischievous blue eyes were watching him from a hole in the ceiling, in the shadow of the projecting chimney-brace.

‘Yes; I have scribbled a few verses betwixt midnight and morning—bosh, no doubt, but they may do for *you*,’ replied the *Réfractaire*, with a scornful accent.

‘Good! Let us go over them together presently. And have you touched up those verses I brought you the other day? They were a little in the rough, perhaps, but full of strong ideas.’

‘No. I tried hard; but those attempts of yours are really too bad. The versification is

simply impossible ; and for ideas—well, I found two. One verbatim from Heine ; the other, a thinly disguised theft from Baudelaire. I am very sorry, my dear Vicomte, but your own stuff really won’t do. The Parisian public and the Parisian press will stand a great deal from a man of fashion, with a sprig of nobility in his cap—but they won’t stand such twaddle as yours.’

‘You have at least the merit of candour,’ said the Vicomte, deeply offended. ‘If you had written the verses yourself you would think better of them.’

‘Perhaps. There never was a mongrel so ugly that the mother did not love him.’

‘I wrung those lines out of my heart.’

‘Then do not wring your heart any more. The game is not worth the candle. Let us be business-like, Vicomte. I tried to chop your lines into shape, to introduce an idea or two into that wilderness of words, but it was not to be done. If you want poetry you must be content to get it ready-made, as you did your idyl of the carrion by the river, which you tell me is your chief success. Here are ballads and songs for you, *plein le dos*, amorous, blasphemous, despairing, communistic ; not an idea worth speaking of in the whole batch,

but enough of the swing and the melody of verse to make them pass current—as the work of a Pontchartrain.’

‘I would rather we worked together on metal from my own mine,’ said Paul, with dignity.

‘My dear friend, your mine produces nothing but scoria. I tell you, I have spent dismal hours trying to lick this wretched twaddle of yours into shape. I will look at it no more. If you want to fill your new volume——’

‘*Charniers et Sépulcres*,’ said the Vicomte: ‘my publisher wants the completion of my manuscript before the end of next week. The season for poetry is nearly over.’

‘If you must publish you had better give him these things of mine. You can read them before you make up your mind. They are the very lees in my cup of inspiration; yet they are not so bad but that I have read worse in the Magazines.’

He opened a ragged, rusty old blotting-book, once a costly thing in Russia leather, with gilded crest and monogram on the cover, and from a confusion of papers he picked out nine or ten loose sheets, which he handed across the table to Monsieur de Pontchartrain, who read them very slowly, commenting and questioning as he went along, with the captious air of a man determined

to find fault. Sometimes he demanded an explanation of sentences which he found obscure sometimes he stopped to check off the feet of a line on his fingers.

‘You have a trochee here where it ought to be an iambus,’ he said. ‘*Mon Dieu, c’est terrible !* It flays one’s ears.’

‘My ear had an odd knack of being true in the old days,’ said the hack quietly. ‘I would venture the price of the ballad that you are mistaken ;’ and thereupon he demonstrated that the Vicomte was altogether wrong.

The loft to which Amélie and her companion had fled was a place of dust and cobwebs, inviolated furniture, mouldy straw, empty boxes, rusty birdcages, the jetsam and flotsam of a cheap lodging-house, and among all this rubbish three or four large cases of shabbily-bound books—pamphlets, magazines, plays, novels. It was the interior of a steep gable, and was not above four feet high in the clear. Those two listeners had to squat in a crouching position on each side of the trap-door, a heavy beam close above their heads. Amélie knew that she was spoiling her pretty holland gown, perhaps massacring the berries in her dainty little hat, and assuredly making a wreck of gloves at nine francs a pair,

and yet it was all she could do to keep herself from exploding into loud laughter. To hear the little fopling, the pretended genius, the sham Musset, the spurious Baudelaire, in whom her sister Hortense believed as in Divinity itself—to hear him buying his verses, bargaining and chafering, as he did presently, for ballads and odes, serenades and *fantaisies*, piece by piece; grudgingly agreeing to pay so many francs for this or that, cheapening the waters of Castaly, making light of the Muses:—to hear all this was as good as the funniest play or the wildest opera bouffe in Paris, as the Belle Helène, or the Grande Duchesse herself, with all the chic and audacity of Schneider at the apex of her fame—Schneider, aflame with diamonds, performing before emperors and kings.

Amélie remembered the Vicomte's noble wrath that afternoon at Lady Constance Danetree's, when she spoke of the literary *teinturier*. She remembered his vehement '*Cela ne se peut pas*,'—the indignant stride of his little varnished boots up and down the room. '*Cela ne se peut pas*,' he had repeated, swelling with heroic scorn. And behold those very poems which had made him the lion of small tea-parties, the pet of elderly young ladies, had been bought and paid for from this

poor *meurt-de-faim* with the threadbare coat and ragged beard.

Armand and Amélie sat smiling at each other among the dust and the cobwebs, the moths and the mice of that dreadful old loft; afraid to stir, lest they should crack their skulls against the thick old tie-beam; smiling across the gulf of the trap-door, through which came the thin voice of the Vicomte, acrid as cheap red wine, bargaining and disputing over Apollo's wares.

When the haggling was all over, and the Vicomte had doled out his cash, and departed, grumbling, with his verses in his pocket, those two listeners in the loft burst into a peal of laughter, long and loud, and a bitter laugh from the garreteer below came up through the trap and mingled with their mirth.

‘Don't let us lose another moment,’ said Amélie, as she came nimbly down the ladder. ‘But, oh, what fun it has been! I would not have missed it for worlds!’

‘Lucky that I am in the habit of using that loft as a library, or there would have been no ladder handy,’ said Monsieur Nimporte. ‘Yes, it is a curious aspect of literature, is it not, when a man buys his verses as he would buy his boots? But the Vicomte makes a harder

bargain with me than he would with his boot-maker.'

'Ah, but he pays you ready money,' said Kératry, laughing. 'That makes all the difference.'

'I shall dine to-night,' replied Jean Nimporte, rattling his cash in his pocket. 'Good day, Mademoiselle. I am glad our transactions have amused you.'

'I only wish you had a better market for your verses, Monsieur,' answered Amélie, with a gracious curtsy. 'You seem to be clever enough to set up half a dozen fashionable poets.'

'I have learnt my trade, Mademoiselle, that is all.'

He went out to the landing with his guests, and bade them adieu with the grace of a Lauzun or a Richelieu.

'He is perfectly *distingué*, although his clothes and his room are more terrible than a nightmare,' said Amélie, as she tripped quickly down the greasy old staircase. 'And now, for pity's sake, get me a carriage of some kind, as fast as you can, and tell the man to drive me to Lady Constance Danetree's, so that mamma and Hortense may find me there when they call at five o'clock. I shall tell Lady Constance my morning's adventures, and all about Monsieur Pontchartrain.'

How amused she will be. Poor Hortense, with her poet *pour rire* ! If I were to tell *her* this secret now, she could let Pontchartrain know that she had found him out, and he would make her an offer of marriage within the next twenty-four hours, out of sheer fright.’

‘It would only be sisterly to try the experiment,’ said Kératry, as they walked towards St. Sulpice, looking for a *voiture de place*.

‘I’ll think about it,’ replied Amélie. ‘Hortense is a very unleserving object ; but she certainly is my sister ; and I suppose that constitutes a claim upon one’s good nature.’

CHAPTER IV.

‘AND THE DAY SHALL BE DARK OVER THEM.’

JEAN NIMPORTE, otherwise Hector de Valnois, sank back in his tattered old easy chair, directly his visitors were gone, and refilled his little black pipe, which, next to the yellow-green liquid in his glass, was the consolation of his days. Between *absinthe* and tobacco he contrived to endure life, and to forget that he had been once a creature of lofty aspirings, that he had once dreamt of fame and the Academy. He lay back in his chair, gazing at the motes dancing in the sunshine, and smiled his cynical smile at the little scene which had just ended. Presently he took the Vicomte's money out of his pockets, and counted it in the hollow of his wasted hand. A few napoleons, and a handful of francs—a shabby honorarium even for the lees of genius. But the verses which were good enough for Monsieur de Pontchartrain to publish under his own name and at his own risk, would not

have found a purchaser among the publishers of Paris, who had long ago closed their pockets against Hector's muse.

‘My dear fellow, you had better go down to posterity as the author of *Mes Nuits Blanches*,’ said Michel Levy, of the Librairie Nouvelle, the chief rendezvous of intellectual Paris. ‘You will never again write anything as good.’

Poetry, therefore, had long ceased to count as a means of bread-winning; but there were long wakeful hours, in the dreary dead of the night, when Valnois found a transient relief in verse—when the unsuccessful man's rebellious anger against fate, the disappointed man's remorse for his own follies, the lonely man's sense of lovelessness and abandonment, found their expression in wild revilings of Providence, or in the opium-eater's visions of an impossible Paradise; and these effusions, the safety-valve which kept the engine from explosion, were just good enough to sell to Paul de Pontchartrain, and fifty times better than the most laborious efforts of that aristocratic driveller.

‘I shall dine to-night,’ said Valnois, looking at his money; ‘and I shall pay my last *trimestre* for this accursed den, so that I may be safe from being thrust out into the street for the next month or two. If Pâquerette were here I would

give her a new gown. Poor Pâquerette! Was I very brutal that day, when my brain was maddened with *absinthe* and my temples were throbbing with neuralgia? A man is not particularly choice in his language at such a time. I may have driven her away from me by cruel words; or she may have made up her mind to leave this life of semi-starvation in an attic. She may have flown to a warmer nest. Who knows? It is the common lot of alliances like ours to end so!’

He smoked and mused, and sipped his *absinthe*. He had replenished his glass often during the two interviews, with *absinthe*, but not with water; so that the stuff he was drinking now was almost *absinthe* pure. It was much too early for him to show himself in the streets, even in this free-and-easy students’ quarter, where a good coat was not *de rigueur*. The summer sun was still in its glory, a sun in which his once black coat looked a greyish-green, and his haggard face more ghastly than that frayed and threadbare coat. No; he would wait till the friendly dusk, and then stroll to the Restaurant Lapérouse, on the Quai des Grands-Augustins, where he could dine sumptuously, at moderate cost, in a room facing the river.

He was tired after his two interviews, and fell asleep in his chair presently; a sleep which lasted long, lulled by the distant sounds of the city, undisturbed even by the bells of St. Sulpice ringing for vespers. His nights were wakeful and fevered; and it was only after mental exhaustion that he slept soundly.

It was growing dusk, when there came a tap at the door, which startled him into broad wakefulness. Before he could answer the summons the handle was turned, and a man entered.

There was enough of the yellow western light still shining through the open window to show the man's face as he stood within the doorway. It was the drink-soddened countenance of that man who stopped Ishmael in the street the night he left the meeting of the Cercle du Prolo, the man who called himself Dumont. Valnois started to his feet.

‘You!’ he exclaimed. ‘Why, it is an age since you have been here; and I began to think you were dead.’

‘Did you?’ replied the other, coolly. ‘What use would there have been in my coming here? I had nothing to tell you. I was poorer than you.’

‘You seem to have mended your fortunes,’

said Valnois, surveying his visitor from head to foot. 'I never remember seeing you in such a sound coat, or in boots so instinct with the primal grace of the bootmaker. May I ask what gold-mine you have discovered in the gutters of Paris?'

'I have found the best substitute for a gold-mine, in the shape of a wealthy patron.'

'Indeed!' retorted the other, contemptuously; 'and what manner of man, and for what kind of motive, can be found to patronise Theodore de Valnois, *alias* Dumont?'

'I think there is only one true definition for the word patron—a rich man who wants to make use of a poor man,' answered Dumont; 'and just such a patron have I found in the person of an old friend of yours.'

'Friend! I have no friend.'

'Not now, I grant. But you had a friend once; a friend whose life you saved on the fatal fourth of December, and who ought to have been grateful to you. Yet I suppose it will be said you cancelled the obligation afterwards.'

'No fooling, cousin. You take yourself for a wit, and that is about the only original opinion I ever discovered in you. You have been sponging upon Pâquerette's husband. Is that what you mean?'

‘I have been making myself useful to him. *That* is what I mean.’

‘You have found Pâquerette?’ exclaimed Hector, eagerly.

‘No; I am looking for her, or for evidence of her death. That is my present profession, for which I draw a modest little income by way of expenses; and I am divided in my mind as to whether I shall keep her alive, and content myself with the occasional egg my golden goose lays for me, or whether I shall kill her and my golden goose at the same time for the sake of ready money.’

‘You are talking enigmas.’

‘Not very obscure ones, dear cousin. Ishmael wants to be sure that his wife is dead—no doubt with a view to taking a second wife. If I can show him the *acte de décès*, he will give me a small sum of money—small, very small—but a godsend for a man in my position. Now what is to prevent me producing the *acte de décès*?’

‘Nothing, except the fact that Pâquerette is still living—at least I hope so; and that forgery and falsification of official documents mean felony, and that felony—above all a second felony—means a longer seclusion from society than I think you would care to enter upon at your time of life.’

‘That is a stumbling-block, I grant; but one that ought not to prove insurmountable to a man who has lived his life—sixty-six years, my Hector, and nearly half-a-century of failure and danger, shifts and difficulties, disappointments and disguises. If such a career as that cannot make a man dexterous, what can? There have been false *actes de décès* before to-day; and there will be again, until the art of forgery is exploded.’

‘Difficult and dangerous!’ said Valnios.

‘Difficulty and danger are the atmosphere I have breathed ever since I was twenty!’

‘You must take your own way in life, though it has not led you into pleasant places hitherto. I have nothing to do with your schemes; I am not a forger; and I am not going to extort money from Pâquerette’s husband.’

The man who called himself Dumont came over to the open window and lounged with his elbows on the window sill, looking across the dim perspective of gables and chimney-pots to the gilded dome of the Invalides, shining in the last rays of sunset.

‘Poor little Pâquerette!’ he said gently, ‘Pâquerette with her lily face and her pathetic eyes. I always liked her. There was always a soft spot in this tough old heart of mine for

Pâquerette. I was sorry for her too, for her fate was sad, and you were not altogether kind to her.’

Hector started from the half-recumbent position which he had resumed a minute or so before, and put down his pipe suddenly with a hand made tremulous by anger. ‘How dare you say that!’ he exclaimed. ‘I loved her, and was true to her. Our path was not strewn with roses. If there were thorns we trod upon them side by side. Why do you harp upon Pâquerette’s name?—you must have seen her lately; you must have discovered something.’

‘I have not seen her since I saw her in this room more than three months ago,’ answered the elder man; and then he turned from the window and faced Hector with a grave countenance: ‘But I have discovered something.’

‘What?’

‘I have found out who Pâquerette is!’

‘Who she is, poor child!’ echoed Hector, sadly: ‘not much mystery there, I should think. The child of poverty, the child of neglect, the drudge of a drunken grandfather and grandmother. What can there be to discover in such a lot?’

‘Poor as she was she had a father,’ said Dumont.

‘And it is about that father you have made your discovery?’

‘Yes!’

‘An interesting one? an aristocratic mystery, eh?’ asked Hector, with his cynical air, refilling his pipe.

He thought his kinsman was trifling with him.

‘Interesting to me,’ answered the other, gravely. ‘Pâquerette is my daughter.’

‘Your daughter! You never told me that you had one,’ said Hector.

‘There are numerous episodes in my life which I have not told you. Perhaps this is the one of which I have least reason to be ashamed; and yet I am not free from blame even here. Pâquerette is my daughter, the daughter of my youth, the child of my one true and pure love, the child of my wife.’

‘Your wife! Another revelation!’

‘You have heard how I came to Paris to study law; rich in academical honours, poor in purse. Your father, my father’s first cousin, looked down upon our branch of the house. Your father was a landed gentleman, in a small way; mine, a doctor in a little country town. You have heard no doubt how I neglected my legal studies, was

plucked in my examinations, went to the bad altogether, from the provincial and Philistine point of view. But you may not have heard that I was a great man in a certain set, and those the advanced Reds, socialists of the most scarlet dye. I became a voice and a power among those men—lived anyhow, gambled a good deal, and was just lucky enough to keep my head above water. I drained the student’s cup of pleasure to the dregs. There is not a *cabaret* or *café-concert* in this quarter of the town in which I have not wasted my nights; not a billiard-room that these feet of mine have not trodden. I had my flirtations too in those days with many a handsome *grisette*: but I never knew what love meant till a fair pale face flashed past me in the twilight, and I turned to follow a graceful figure in a shabby grey gown. Ah, how shabby she was, how poor she looked, dear child; and yet such a gracious creature!’

‘Was this Pâquerette’s mother?’

‘Yes; a girl working at a clear-starcher’s not very far from this street; a modest, honest, shy young creature, who blushed and trembled at my voice. It was weeks before I could win her confidence. If—if I ever had the thought of betraying her—and God knows what infamy may

have lurked in my mind at the first—her innocence, her girlish simplicity, her perfect faith disarmed me. We had not known each other many weeks before I was her slave. And was I, a socialist, reddest among the Reds—I who believed in the perfect equality of men, who scouted the bondage of caste—was I to shrink from allying myself with a pure and lovely girl because her parents were working people? What had I to lose by a low marriage? What hope or prospect had I of a loftier alliance? I—the penniless scapegrace! What chance had I of marrying rank or money? I counted the cost, and found I should sacrifice nothing by marrying the girl I loved; and I married her one fine morning at the Mairie, after having romanced to her a little over-much, perhaps, poor child! about my father's noble blood and his château—a stuccoed box on the dusty outskirts of our town.'

'You married her! That was an honest act, at least.'

'Yes; I had flashes of honest feeling in those days; I married my love one fine May morning: but I had no home except a garret to which I could take her, and I let her go on working at the laundry and living in her parent's wretched hole, while I beat about for a way of supporting

her and myself, somehow or somewhere. Our stolen hours of happiness, our dances at the Pré Catalan, our little jaunts to the fairs about Paris, our rides in jolting old cuckoos, were the sweetest hours of my youth. One wrong, and one only, I did my love in that beginning of our life. I made her swear to keep her marriage secret. I would not have Père and Mère Lemoine for father and mother-in-law. I meant to leave Paris, as soon as I could scrape a little money together, and to settle at Lyons, or some other large town, for a few years, only returning to the capital when I could feel sure of having given the Lemoines the slip. If you knew the kind of gentry they were you would not wonder at this prejudice on my part, ultra Republican as I was.’

‘Pâquerette has told me that they were dreadful people.’

‘We had been married less than three months when my Jeanneton began to be unhappy at her laundry. She had been seen with me at the Pré Catalan, she had been seen with me at a fair at Saint-Cloud, seen walking with me in the streets of an evening—and scandal, the broad gross scandal of the vulgar, began to asperse her fair name. Hints and insinuations were flung at her—sneers and vulgar taunts which to her were torture. So one day,

after a night's run of luck at a gambling-house in the Palais Royal, I told her to be ready to leave Paris with me next morning at daybreak. We travelled southward through the bright days of autumn. Oh, happy days! oh, happy journey!—last glimpse of paradise that I ever saw on this earth! After that my career was all downhill. I was unlucky, idle, reckless; I had not the blessed faculty of continuous work. I could talk, I could write flashy articles for the Republican newspapers. I picked up a few louis honestly now and then. But I lacked the blessed gift of patience. I was a born gamester. When I had a chance, I trifled with it. And finally, within a year of my daughter's birth, my reckless folly landed me—where you know.'

'In the galleys. A bad hotel for a gentleman of good family.'

'Pâquerette struggled on while I was in that hell upon earth—worked for herself and her infant—starved sometimes, came to see me in my misery as often as the rigour of that devilish place allowed. This lasted for nearly a year; and then, for the first time, my poor love was missing when the appointed day and hour came round. She had come to me, ill or well, in fair or foul weather; and my heart turned cold when the

allotted hour came and passed without sign or token from her. Hell seemed blacker on that wretched day than it had ever seemed since I entered it.’

‘She was dead, perhaps?’

‘Dead, no; not yet. It was a ghastly story. It would take too long to tell you the details. Enough that I came by the knowledge of the facts by the aid of a priest, whose presence was the only gleam of light in that Inferno,—even to me, the mocker at creeds and creed-makers. I came in time to know that my poor girl had fled in a panic from the wretched den in which she had lived for some months—had fled on foot from Toulon—because the scoundrel who owned the house had pursued her with infamous proposals, and when she shrank from him with indignant loathing, had conspired with some of the vilest inmates of his house to bring a charge of theft against her. The plot was shallow enough, her innocence obvious; but in her helplessness and inexperience—weak, ill, penniless, friendless, my poor girl took fright. She saw herself in danger of being shut up in that place which she knew too well from my abhorrent description, from the glimpses she had had of my surroundings. She fled from Toulon with her child, on foot, panic-

stricken at that false charge. This much, and no more, could I discover six years afterwards, when I was a free man; free as a man can be with the brand upon his shoulder, the taint of prison life infecting him, his yellow passport the herald of his disgrace in every town he enters. I was free; but I was a ruined man, and I was a heart-broken man into the bargain. The scoundrel who had conspired against Pàquerette had died an evil death; so I had not even the comfort of revenge. I left Toulon, hardened as only seven years of the chain can harden a man; hardened still more by the loss of that one creature I had honestly and fondly loved. I was never able to trace my poor Jeanneton's footsteps to her nameless grave. Perhaps I might have tried harder; but those from whom I heard her story told me that the stamp of death was on her when she left Toulon. She had not a week's life in her, they said.'

'And your child? You took no pains to learn her fate?' asked Hector.

'Why should I seek her, poor waif? Had I a home to give her, or even an honest name? If she had drifted to some abode of charity so much the better; if she had gravitated towards the gutter I had no power to rescue her. The infant had never fastened herself upon my heart

as her mother had done. The woman I loved being gone, I was content the child should go with her. If I had found her, and could have sheltered her, she would have been not the less a grief and a pain to me, recalling what I had lost. When I left Toulon I had done with human affection. I set my face towards Paris; went back into the jungle of the great city, to live upon my fellow-men—a beast of prey, among other beasts of prey.’

‘You are a strange being, my cousin.’

‘I am what life has made me. Perhaps if I had been born with a big rent-roll I should have been the soul of honour.’

‘And you say Paquerette is your daughter? Are you sure of her identity, sure that there is no missing link in the chain?’

‘I am sure. The first time I ever saw that girl’s face, the night I met her with you on the steps of Tortoni’s, it was as if I had seen a ghost. It was Jeanneton’s face that flitted by me in the lamplight; a face from Hades. Later, as she altered with the fatigues and cares of her theatrical career, it was still Jeanneton’s face; Jeanneton’s face as I saw it last in the *bagne*. I had no suspicion of the truth. I thought of the likeness only as one of those accidental resemblances which

are common enough in life. Had you, either of you, mentioned the rue Sombreuil, or the name of Lemoine—had you told me that Pâquerette was a fatherless waif, reared in that place, I should have been certain of the truth. But it was left for Pâquerette's husband to enlighten me as to her parentage.'

'And since you have known the tie that unites her to you you have hunted for her?'

'Everywhere. I told Ishmael that I had never been able to trace her beyond Valparaiso, and that I must go to Valparaiso to find the track. Need I say that I did not go so far as South America in search of the poor girl whom I last saw in this room. I drew a nice little lump of money for my passage to and fro, and contrived to lie *perdu* in Paris, while I cautiously prosecuted my quest for my missing daughter. I have not yet returned from Valparaiso, and I doubt if I shall return until I am furnished with the *acte de décès* from the authorities of that port.'

'Scamp and trickster to the last!'

'Can the leopard change his spots, or the Ethiopian his skin? or could you show me any way to earn my bread honestly, if I wanted to begin life afresh? No, my cousin; there is deep significance in that old fable of Hercules and

the two roads. A man makes his choice, once in his life, by which road he will travel; and, by heaven, when once he has taken the wrong turning, there is no cross-cut that will get him back to the right road. I took the wrong turning nine-and-thirty years ago, when I squandered the little hoard my father had scraped together to pay for my legal education: and from that hour to this every step I have travelled has been upon the downward road.’

‘Do you think that Pâquerette is still living?’ enquired Hector, gloomily. She had wretched health last winter. I have had many a miserable hour in the watches of the night, picturing her alone, friendless, penniless, dying of some lingering malady.’

‘Who knows? Paris is like a great forest. She might be living in the next street; and one would know nothing. I have put half a dozen advertisements, cautiously worded, in the likeliest newspaper; but she may not have seen them. I have employed a man who keeps a private inquiry office, and who has a knack of hunting down people where everybody else would fail. But as yet he has not found her, or any trace of her. Meanwhile it seems a pity that I should not touch a lump of money for the *acte de décès*. She

would be no worse off for being dead and buried—on paper; and it will be easy to resuscitate her later, and to explain that the document was a mistake.'

'Cheat Ishmael as much as you like, my cousin, on your own account; but bring none of your unholy gains this way. The coin would smell of brimstone,' answered Hector, with a weary air.

That name of Ishmael always gave him a thrill of pain. It reminded him of the past, when he had been the benefactor and Ishmael the obliged; when he had been the superior; when hope still smiled upon his path; when life was still glad. And now Ishmael's name was a word of power in Paris; Ishmael had won the wealth which sweetens existence, which makes a man a ruler among his fellow-men.

And he, Ishmael's superior by education and opportunity, by the divine spark of poetic genius, where was he in the meridian of life?—a star that had burnt out; a mine that had given up all its precious metal—a mere husk of manhood, looking with tired eyes along a dismal road whose end is death and oblivion.

CHAPTER V.

‘THE KINGDOMS OF NATIONS GATHERED TOGETHER.’

THE world was four weeks older since that memorable sixth of June when Berezowski tried to cut short a life which was destined to end in after years by the handiwork of a bolder assassin. Berezowski, valiantly defended by Emmanuel Arago, had been condemned to imprisonment for life; and the Czar had gone back to St. Petersburg somewhat offended that a French jury had spared the life of his would-be assassin. The glory of the great show in the Champs de Mars was waning a little, at least to the jaded eye of the Parisian, who saw the great glittering temple every day if he pleased. There had been a plethora of kings and princes, sultans and potentates from far corners of the earth, and the distinctly local mind of the Parisian was in a state of historical and geographical bewilderment. On the outward crust of things, that gathering of the nations was the crowning glory of the Imperial rule, the triumph of the peaceful arts—not forgetting

a good deal of space in the show devoted to the exhibition of the latest developments, improvements, and inventions in the art of slaughter. It was a reign of peace—peace without honour, as some fractious and bellicose spirits protested. France had preserved her neutrality; and had lost her prestige. On one side she beheld a united Italy—unfriendly, ungrateful, suspicious; on the other, a mighty Germanic confederation which threatened her frontiers. The daring state-craft of Bismarck, strong in the triumph of Sadowa, had transformed the modest kingdom of Prussia into a many-headed monster, swollen with the overweening pride of victorious arms.

Seen by the stranger, Imperial France, as represented by this city of wide boulevards and many cafés, new theatres, and new bridges, market-places such as no other city in Europe could show—judged by the splendour of brick and stone, glass and iron, the second Empire might be taken to be at the apex of its glory; but the diplomatists and the statesmen who came to see the show could look deeper into things than this outer husk of pseudo-classic boulevards and much expenditure in the building line. They knew that the glory of the Empire had grown old like a garment, and her sun had gone down while it was yet day. The tragical end of

that fond dream of an Imperial Mexico, the failure of the negotiations about Luxembourg, the unfriendly attitude of Italy, the double-dealing of Prussia—all these were thorns in the pillow of him whose sombre face, aged by chronic malady, assumed the monarch's kindly smile as he returned the greeting of subject or of stranger. Ah, what a strange and fatal history was suggested by that bent head, that meditative and anxious brow, those features darkened by secret thought! A childhood saddened by exile; a youth of ambitious dreams and vague aspirations amid the mists of Lake Constance; anon the enthusiast's wild efforts to rekindle the star of a banished dynasty; then ignominious failure and the weary education of captivity and exile. All the dazzle and splendour of a reign of unexampled prosperity had failed to obliterate those shadows of early care; and now the noontide of success had waned, and the shades were deepening as the pilgrim descended the hill. To the indifferent eye he was but little changed since the Empire was young—a trifle more bent, perhaps, a shade graver and grayer than in that brilliant noon of success and popularity; and that was all. But those who were about his person noted how from this time he sank into a deeper taciturnity than that of old, and isolated himself oftener amidst the clouds of his

cigarette. He read little : he wrote no more. The Imperial dreamer was wrapped in his dream, and the dream was slowly darkening to the blackness of night.

It was the second of July, day distinguished above other days by the distribution of prizes at the Palace of Industry—a ceremonial to be presided over by the Emperor, who himself received a first prize for his workmen's dwellings. Never was this Empire of Yesterday more brilliantly supported by the princes and potentates of ancient days. England was here in the person of her *débonnaire* young prince, heir to that crown which had once claimed this wide France as an appanage. Yonder, in shining robes of purest white, came the Sultan, unconscious of that dark line of murder in his house of life ; the Prince of Orange, the Duke of Cambridge, the Duke of Teck, the Crown Prince of Prussia, Humbert of Italy, Mohemmed-Effendi, Abdul-Hamid, princes, princesses, and princelings seemingly numberless as the starry host ; and among them all the Empress Eugénie, fairest star in that splendid galaxy. A wonderful *cortége*, a procession of stars and garters, knighthoods of every order, saintly badges, eagles and crowns—a dazzling train, moving slowly, with stately footsteps, to the music of a triumphal hymn composed by Rossini in honour of this great occasion.

The Emperor's speech was full of that all-round congratulation and pious exultation which are the dominant notes in such speeches. He felicitated himself and Paris upon having received all the princes and potentates of the civilised world, and the masses of the nations in their train. He bade his subjects take pride to themselves in having shown the peoples of the earth France in the zenith of her greatness, her prosperity, her freedom. Foreign nations must needs appreciate this great country, once so troubled, to-day laborious, calm, fertile in noble ideas, rich in genius, unspoiled by material prosperity. Despite the increase of wealth, despite the natural bent of civilised man to pleasure and luxury, the national fibre was ever ready to vibrate, the national heart to beat high to the call of honour. But that warlike impulse of noble souls need be no longer a cause of peril for the repose of the world. France was no longer the disturber of the nations.

The initiated were not deceived by Imperial rhetoric. *They* knew that the moment which the Emperor had chosen for the glorification of France and her institutions was the very moment when those institutions were on the verge of shipwreck. The hearts of her men and women were rotten at the core: debased by a life of

dissipation and effeminate luxury ; a society made up of *cliquant* and *pacotille* ; a nation living beyond its means, and inciting other nations to a like foolishness ; a society in which home-life was almost extinct, and religion no more than a fashionable formula, patronized by the wives and daughters, ignored by husbands and fathers.

While the music of that triumphal hymn was reverberating along the roof of the Palace of Industry, which for to-day was softened by a white velarium, spangled with golden stars ; while the drums were beating, and the pompous procession was moving with slow and stately tread under the sunlight, was there no vision before the Emperor's eyes—nearer, more vivid than the flags and the eagles, the dazzle of splendid uniforms the brilliant colouring of the patrician crowd, the trophies, and palm trees, and flowers—was there no nearer vision of a brother Emperor, scion of an Imperial house, a young man now lying in his bloody grave, the victim of an ambitious dreamer's fatal error ? The news of Maximilian's death] was fresh in the Emperor's mind on that July afternoon. He had received the despatch that told him his *protégé's* doom in that very building, just before he made his speech. Yes, it was there before him, the bloody vision

of his ghastliest failure—the foredoomed Mexican expedition. The young Emperor, with his handful of troops, helpless in beleaguered and famished Queretaro; the attempted flight in the dim dawn of a summer morning; and then, flight proving hopeless, the white flag, and the piteous appeal to Escobedo: 'Let me go under escort to any port you please from whence I may embark for Europe: I swear to you on my honour never again to set foot in Mexico.'

Never again! Alas, poor scion of the Hapsburgs, not so easily does the fatal trap into which thy foolish footsteps have been lured unlock its iron jaws. There have been evil deeds done in thy name in this land of extinct volcanos. These men are bloodthirsty in their triumph, and no plea from Republican America yonder, no prayers of thine own friends, nor the heroic advocacy of thy counsel, can save thee. Bravely dost thou go to thy untimely death in the pale June morning; while that far-off Paris, which sent thee to thy doom, is all a-flutter with the flags of her festival.

Bazaine was at Nancy, keeping quiet. At his landing at Havre he had been received without honour—indeed, with all the signs and tokens of disgrace. But already the Imperial displeasure

was lessened. There had been no court-martial, no impeachment, no day of reckoning. That was to come later, for master and servant.

Lady Constance Danetree was among the fashionable crowd at this Imperial function. However little one may care for such spectacles one must assist at them, or society will ask 'why not?' and it is sometimes more trouble to explain an omission, than to make the sacrifice of inclination which society requires. Lady Constance had been going everywhere of late. She had her box for the Tuesdays at the Français; she was seen at the opera, at the little theatres, at every race-meeting near Paris. She seemed to have a thirst for amusement, to be hurrying hither and thither in quest of excitement.

'I thought you cared very little about these things,' her friend Lady Valentine said to her one night at a great festival at the opera. 'You used to laugh at my love of pleasure, and to wonder that I, who am nearly twenty years your senior, could live so much in society. I told you that as you grew older you would want more amusement. But that time has not come yet.'

'One must go with the herd,' answered Constance listlessly.

'But you never used to go with the herd,'

remonstrated Lady Valentine; ‘that was your great charm. You were not afraid to think for yourself. I am sure that this feverish life does not suit you. You are looking pale and worn, haggard almost. You will lose your beauty if you are not careful.’

‘I am not going to be careful for the sake of that unknown quantity which you are pleased to call my beauty,’ answered Constance laughing. ‘One must enjoy one’s life.’

‘Ah, but you don’t look as if you were enjoying life. You don’t look happy.’

Lady Valentine took upon herself all the privileges of an old friend, and was eminently troublesome. Other people were not so familiar with Constance Danetree’s character, and to that outer circle she seemed a radiant creature, full of enjoyment in a very enjoyable world, gifted with all charms and blessings that can make life worth living. She went everywhere, was seen everywhere, in that merry month of June—theatres, operas, balls, races, concerts, dinners, afternoon gatherings of all kinds. Wherever the *élite* of Paris were to be found, Constance Danetree was sure to be among them. But go where she would, she never met the great contractor, the man of bridges, and markets, and

viaducts, and railways. Not once since that afternoon of June the sixth had she looked upon the face of Ishmael. Nor did she hear his name often in society; for although he was revered for his success, and the wealth that had followed success, he was not a man of the world in society's acceptance of the word. He did not spend his money as a man should who wishes to stand well with society. He lived in an old-world corner of Paris, and entertained only his few and particular friends. He bought neither pictures nor statues; he collected neither rare plate nor old books. His figure was unknown in the Hôtel Drouot. He was nobody's patron in the world of art. He had no château in the country, no shooting parties or wild boar hunts. He kept no stud, had won no distinction upon the turf, which was just then the ultra-fashionable amusement alike for aristocrat and plutocrat. By those who knew very little about him he was set down as a churl and a miser—a man who chose to live apart and gloat over his money-bags, rather than to float gaily along that brisk current of pleasure and dissipation which was so merrily drifting young France one knew not whither.

Those who knew him well, knew that he was one of the foremost philanthropists of France,

that his purse had helped and his brain had guided some of the noblest schemes for the welfare of men, women and children which the modern science of charity had devised. His purse did not open at every call. He was not a prey to the charlatan brood who make benevolence a trade, the letter-writers and red-tapists, the theorists and fussy-philanthropists. He had founded a benevolent institution of considerable importance, which he maintained at his own cost, governing and administering it in person, upon his own system. This was a refuge and school for indigent boys and girls, very much upon the plan of the admirable institutions founded later by Monsieur Bonjean, noble son of a heroic father, and by the good Abbé Roussel, for boys only. The home was in the country, in a village beyond Marly, and hither he sent the friendless little waifs whom his agents gathered up like fallen leaves, out of Parisian gutters, to be purified and re-created amidst green fields and flowers, woods and running streams. There were no happier hours of the millionaire's life than those which he spent among these rescued *voyous*, watching them at work in the quaint old gardens, or at their studies in the grave old house, which had been a monastery before the revolution of

ninety-three, and which, being left remote from railroads and in a state of decay, had been bought for about a fourth of its value.

At the children's home Ishmael was known as Monsieur Chose, and it was only his most intimate friends who knew him as the author of this good work. His interest in, and his labours for, this large institution occupied all his intervals of leisure in this summer of sixty-seven; and he had refused all invitations, save for those public banquets at which his presence was a professional necessity. He had only been two or three times at the exhibition, and on each occasion he had gone only to do the honours of the show to some distinguished foreigner in his own line of life—a Nasmyth, a Peto, or a Cunard.

Thus the month had passed, and he and Constance Danetree had never met. She had gone everywhere, trying to forget him, despising herself because of that weakness of her woman's heart which made forgetfulness impossible. She had tried to drown thought and memory in the wine of pleasure: but the wine tasted of dust and ashes, and memory remained unaltered.

The evening of July the second was to be distinguished by a grand ball at a noble old house in the faubourg Saint Germain. It was a

ball that had been talked of incessantly in Lady Constance Danetree's circle for the last three weeks. The giver of the entertainment was the Baroness Clavaroche, a lady whose husband had been until a year ago a staunch Legitimist, but who, soon after the death of his mother—an ancient dame distinguished for the severity of her morals, the dignity of her manners, and the rancour of her hatred for the race of Bonaparte—had astonished all Parisian society by suddenly turning his coat, and accepting an important office at the Imperial court. Like all converts, the Baron was intense in his enthusiasm for his new creed, swore by the Emperor in this twilight of his glory as if it had been still broad noon, was a passionate advocate of the Imperial policy, in the Chamber and out of it—out Rouher-ing Rouher himself, the ‘second Emperor,’ in the boldness of his partisanship.

The Baroness Clavaroche, who was about fifteen years her husband's junior, and who loved gaiety and expenditure, considered it her bounden duty to give a festivity of some kind in honour of the Imperial idea. She had sent out cards for a ball which, according to the tongues of rumour, was to surpass in splendour all private entertainments of this splendid year. Every-

body who was noble, or rich, or famous, or beautiful, had been invited to the festival, and not to have been asked meant social ostracism. Madame Clavaroche and Lady Constance met in the fashionable crowd at the Palace of Industry on the morning of the second, the Baroness radiant with delight at the success of her ball, which was already an assured fact: for in society success begins with the voice of rumour and the excitement of anticipation. A ball not talked about immensely beforehand would be a pre-doomed failure.

‘Everybody is coming,’ exclaimed Madame Chavaroche; ‘everybody. I could count the few refusals on my fingers; and those are all from people who are too ill to move.’

‘Have you asked Monsieur Ishmael, who came after the Emperor, and took first prize for workmen’s houses,’ inquired Constance carelessly, ‘among your numerous notorieties?’

‘Yes, I asked Monsieur Ishmael. He is a great favourite of mine—so earnest, so original, such a contrast to our *petits crevés*. I did not forget him. But I am sorry to say he is one of my few refusals.’

‘What! Is *he* too ill to move?’

‘No, but he tells me he is not going out

anywhere this season. He has some great work in hand—a railway in the south somewhere, between Nîmes and the Pyrenees, a stupendous affair, all viaduct and tunnel. He is too busy to go to balls. But we shall have plenty of notabilities for you—the Siamese Princes, the Cham of Tartary, the brother of the Tycoon. I am told the brother of the Tycoon is a most fascinating person—not handsome, you know, according to our European idea, but a most interesting type. Be sure you come early.’

‘If I do, I shall not stay late,’ answered Constance. ‘I find that I am growing old, and soon grow tired of lights and music.’

‘That is all nonsense. You must come early and stay late. I want beauty to be a conspicuous element in my rooms. What is the use of providing a background of flowers, and fountains, and electric light, if the living foreground is to be made up of ugliness? Tell me about your costume. Who made it?’

‘You had better ask who is making it. Perhaps it is not yet begun. You know what these people are. I went to the new man who made the gowns for the last comedy at the Gymnase.’

‘You were very wise. The new man has a

taste, an instinct altogether *hors ligne*. Spricht is trading on a past reputation; he has emptied his bag. That pink satin and silver gown Pierson wore in the second act of '*Contagion*' was a marvel. And it was such a brilliant idea to return to the sheen and shimmer of satin, after the dreary reign of lustreless silks. *I am going to wear satin to-night,*' added the Baroness, with an air.

She was a stout woman, fair, and with frizzy hair, always overdressed; for despite the universal prejudice in favour of Parisian taste, there are women in Paris who sin upon the side of superabundant finery.

'If you want to know what you ought *not* to wear,' said Mr. Spricht, the great *couturier*, to one of his favourite clients, privileged to enjoy the dear man's confidence, 'you have only to look at the Baroness Clavaroche.'

'But surely *you* make all her gowns?' exclaimed the customer. 'I have heard her say so.'

'I make her gowns, madame, but I did not make her figure. You would not expect me to waste refined art upon a woman who has no more shape than a pincushion. Madame Clavaroche comes here, and I sell her my most expensive stuffs, and my people make them into

gowns, and load them with the costliest *garniture*; and the result is the Baroness Clavaroche, as you see her. I have nothing to do with it I would not soil my fingers by touching a yard of lace in such a cause. I do not lead a forlorn hope.'

'Then, unless one has a decent figure and a little natural grace, there is no use in coming to you,' murmured the customer meekly, full of reverence for the great man.

'It would be wiser in such a case to keep your money in your pocket. It was the Marquise de Bar-le-duc who persuaded me to undertake Madame Clavaroche, and to oblige that sweet Marquise, who was at that time *du dernier bien* with an exalted personage who shall be nameless, I would do a great deal. If the Baroness had been amenable to reason and good advice, I might have taken some interest in her, in spite of her figure. I might even have succeeded in making her look well. But the Baroness thinks herself a fine woman, and has ideas of her own: two insuperable difficulties. I allow her to wear what she likes;] she pays me forty thousand francs a year; and, as I said before, the result is--the Baroness Clavaroche.'

In spite of this startling condemnation from

the highest authority, the Baroness Clavaroche was the fashion, and helped to lead the fashions in that brilliant Paris of 1867. In those days beauty and grace were not essential elements in a woman of fashion—a grain of wit and a bushel of audacity were rather the indispensable qualifications for that distinguished *rôle*. Was it not said by one of the most accomplished courtiers of that epoch, concerning quite the most charming woman of the Imperial *entourage*, that she was two-thirds lorette and one-third great lady? If this could be said of the great leader of the *beau-monde*, be sure all the little leaders followed in the same track.

The mansion of the Clavaroche family was one of the oldest houses in the faubourg St. Germain. It was situated in one of the quiet old streets of the faubourg, behind those magnificent modern buildings on the quays, the official residences of ministers and ambassadors, the villas of Jewish millionaires and new nobility. There was a suggestion of the past in every gable and chimney in the exterior view, in every cornice and doorway within. For more than a century and a half the good old house had remained unaltered from its original splendour of the Louis Quatorze period. It had begun to be old-fashioned in the days of

the Regency, and was positively *rococo* under Louis Quinze.

During the first Empire, and throughout the reign of Louis Philippe, the Clavaroches dwelt apart. They led a life of absolute seclusion in the midst of the great busy city, received only a few old friends of the most strictly Legitimist opinions, gave themselves up to devotion which touched the boundary line of bigotry, were altogether pious, dull and narrow-minded, refusing to believe in the virtues of the good Citizen King, or to gladden his court by the light of their countenances. They grew old and gray in the old gray house, amidst mouldering draperies, and faded tapestries, and tarnished gilding: relics of the past, which to the Clavar Roche mind were in themselves a patent of aristocracy; curtains which had screened their great-great-grandmothers, arm-chairs in which princes and cardinals of the great king's court had sat; looking-glasses which had reflected the vanished beauty of La Vallière and Montespan.

Baron Clavar Roche lived up to the mature age of forty under the maternal wing, sharing all the opinions and cherishing all the prejudices of *ma mère*, whose hand he kissed in his stately fashion whenever he gave her his

morning greeting ; but shortly after his fortieth birthday, and about three years ago, the Baron, during a visit to the little town of Vichy with his invalid parent, had the happy fortune to win the good graces of a wealthy financier's daughter, a young lady of the new school, and an ardent Bonapartist. The marriage renewed the fortunes of the house of Clavaroche, which had subsided to a dead level of mediocrity ; but it broke the old Baroness's heart. After enjoying the privilege of domineering over her son's habits, opinions, and speech for the last forty years, it seemed a hard thing to have the sceptre of maternal authority, the dignity of her position as mistress of that grave old house in the faubourg, the administration of her son's slender fortune, which she had nursed and managed with a discretion worthy of an old financier, to have all the power and glory of her life snatched from her grasp by a plump and somewhat vulgar young woman of five and twenty, who had been brought up on American principles by a doting and indulgent father, who had been allowed to spend money like water, and who had been flattered by the young fortune-hunters of the period until she fancied herself irresistible.

Perhaps the chief reason of Mademoiselle Bourley's appreciation of the Baron's merits was the fact

that he among all her acquaintance had treated her as a common mortal, and had never stooped to flatter her. The good old name of Clavaroche, the odour of sanctity which hung round these families of the old rock—these things were also an attraction; and Elise Bourley had only been acquainted with Theodore Clavaroche three weeks when she signified to her adoring father that she had at last seen a man whom she could condescend to marry.

‘The others about whom you teased me were all detestable,’ she said; ‘but the Baron Clavaroche is at least a gentleman. And if he is stupid, that will be so much the better for me, as I intend to be mistress in my own house.’

The matter was easily arranged, the bride being one of the richest heiresses in Paris, and the bridegroom having long looked towards marriage as a break in the monotony of his life. A week after the beginning of the Paris winter season, Baron Clavaroche and Mademoiselle Bourley were married at the Madeleine. The service was performed at midnight, a magnificent function, at which all fashionable Paris assisted.

The Dowager Baroness was an old woman when this blow fell upon her, and her health had been failing for some time; but she had stood up like

a tower against the encroachments of age; she had held her own in her narrow circle against all comers; her voice was as loud, her frown as awful, her hatred of existing institutions as rancorous, her abuse of those in power—notably of the good and fair Empress—as vehement as it had been in the early days of the Citizen King: but after her son's marriage she gave way all at once, the tower was sapped at its base, the walls began to crumble, the hour of ruin and downfall was near at hand. On the eve of her son's wedding she made him swear that he would be true to the elder branch of the house of Bourbon, as long as she lived.

‘When I am in my grave you can do what you like,’ she said; ‘I shall not be there to know of your treason: and in purgatory I shall have enough to do to bear the burden of my own sins, without feeling the weight of yours.’

The new Baroness chafed against the old order of things from the very beginning of her wedded life. She longed to sweep away the old furniture, the faded tapestries, the tarnished gilding. It was in vain that her husband urged that the things she despised were precious as objects of art. She replied that the Empress could tolerate nothing that was not strictly in the style of Marie

Antoinette; and that these ornate and ponderous old cabinets and sofas and gigantic arm chairs of the seventeenth century were detestable, these sienna marble slabs and brazen arabesques the very lowest form of art.

'Do not disturb the old house while my mother inhabits it,' he pleaded. 'She will not trouble us long.'

Elise grumbled a little. There was no knowing how long an old woman might spin out the thread of life; and while the Dowager dawdled and lingered over those closing scenes youth was hurrying past for the young Baroness, pleasures hastening by her untasted, while she languished in that dusty old house, and was allowed to receive no one except a few Legitimists who were a quarter of a century behind the times, and still regretted Charles the Tenth. She was panting to call in the great upholsterers of the day, to send all those ponderous *grandeurs* of the past to the auction room, to be sold *en bloc* with all their associations included—aye, even the chair in which Turgot had sat, the table upon which the Duc de Richelieu had played *lansquenet* with cardinals and princes of the blood royal. She was pining to redecorate and refurnish that historic mansion, to awaken the sleeping echoes with the sound of fiddles and

cornets, to set the light airy feet of the Empire dancing in those stately halls that had seen the revels of an older dynasty. She was languishing to let the gay and garish light of the present in upon the dim shadows of the past, to disperse the ghosts, and bring the living, breathing, moving Vanity Fair of new Paris about and around her.

‘You might as well have taken me to live in a tomb,’ she exclaimed pettishly to her husband, whose aristocratic face and dignified bearing might adorn but certainly did not enliven her existence. ‘Indeed, it is much gayer in the funeral chapel of the great Emperor, yonder,’—with a jerk of her head towards the Invalides—‘for *there* people are always coming and going. Here there is no one. At dusk, after the house is shut up for the night, I can *hear* the silence in the hall and on the staircase.’

Baron Clavaroche admitted that the house was rather *triste*: it was a quality of fine old houses to be *triste*; and it was a rare privilege to enjoy in the heart of Paris the seclusion of a *château* in Normandy.

‘I hate *châteaux* in Normandy, or anywhere else,’ exclaimed Elise; ‘and I would rather have an apartment in the Champs Élysées, or in the faubourg Saint Honoré, than this house of yours

which has missed its vocation, since it ought certainly to be a convent for Carmelite sisters who wear nothing but woollen, and are rung up at three o'clock in the morning to say their prayers.'

'There can be nothing changed so long as my mother lives,' the Baron answered gravely.

He had given a promise, and he meant to keep it, at whatever inconvenience to himself. The rich young wife chafed her plumage against her prison bars, complained that there was no use in buying fine gowns when there was no one to see her wear them, but wore the gowns all the same, and was as fine as a parrot in a cage.

But the day came when the gay colours had to be put away for a while, and when the young Baroness had to attire herself in that severe and dense black raiment which makes French mourning such a terrible ordeal to the vain and the frivolous. The last sands had run out in the glass, and the stately funeral car, with its violet velvet canopy, its plumes and silver scutcheons, had come to carry the old Baroness to her last resting place in the vault below a particularly hideous Egyptian tomb in gray granite, on the ridge of the hill, among the

limes and chestnuts of Père Lachaise; and the young Baroness reigned in her stead.

The young Baroness had to endure a long and weary year of mourning, on which Baron Clavaroche insisted as a sacred debt, due to the manes of the departed Dowager, not one hour of which was to be remitted; and then the old house in the old faubourg awakened to life and bustle, and movement and expenditure; in a day, in an hour, in the opening of a door and the entrance of a crowd of workmen. The Baroness had planned everything with architect and upholsterers beforehand, and the process of transformation from the old to the new began with the stroke of the clock that told the last hour of that year of mourning. The Baron gave in his allegiance to the Emperor, a friend in high quarters having brought about the *rapprochement* of these two great men; and as soon as her house was ready the Baroness opened her doors wide to that strange mixed world of the second Empire, a world in which many were beautiful, brilliant, distinguished, brave, clever, while some were even honest and loyal; but in which there were more scamps, *roués*, tricksters and charlatans than had ever been seen in the front rank of society since the days of Philip the Regent, who is said to have

invented that word *roué* for the benefit of his own particular friends. ‘They were mostly creatures worthy of being broken on the wheel,’ said the Prince. The friends for their part affirmed that the *sobriquet* was an honourable one, implying the last degree of loyalty and devotion, and only signified that they were ready to be so broken in the service of their royal master.

The Baron was not a genius, and he did not carry over to the Imperial side of the Senate the weight of a great political reputation; but his name was a power in itself, he voted as he was told to vote, and he spoke as he was told to speak; and in those stormy debates of sixty-seven—debates upon the Mexican question, debates upon the Luxembourg treaty, when the language and the bearing of French senators surpassed in dramatic vehemence and bluster the most vehement and blustering of demagogues or Home Rulers, Baron Clavaroche was useful, were it only as a dead weight.

And now to do honour to the newest development of the Empire, the Baroness Clavaroche opened her doors to receive all fashionable Paris at a *fête* more splendid than had ever been given by a private individual within the memory of the oldest inhabitant of that ancient faubourg, whose

highly respectable inhabitants had a knack of living to a green old age.

The ball was to be a costume ball, and costume balls were not so common in those days as they are now. In those brilliant seasons that followed the marriage of the Emperor—in the day of Crimean victories, of Solferino and Magenta—period of triumph, and glory, and unclouded sunshine—the balls given by Prime Ministers and Imperial favourites had been of an ideal splendour, the costumes and groupings, the historical quadrilles, the quadrilles of the nations, of the four seasons, the constellations, shepherds and shepherdesses after Watteau, the four sons of Aymon—these had been moving pictures of a brilliancy and a beauty to haunt the memory of man. Ah! what stars of beauty had shone upon those nights of fashion and folly. Castiglione, in the audacious triumph of sensuous loveliness, in her costume of Queen of Hearts, braving opinion, confronting society, secure in the dominion of transcendent charms: Gréville; Walewska; each supreme after her fashion, and intent on outshining the glory of her rivals. The Emperor and Empress had loved to assist in these festivities. They had entered and vanished mysteriously, as in a kind of fairy-

land, by secret doors communicating with the Tuileries. They had changed their costumes three or four times during the long night of revelry ; but the Emperor's slow and sidelong walk, or his habit of pulling the drooping ends of his moustache, was apt to betray him in spite of disguises. Grave senators, famous lawyers, had not disclaimed to take part in these assemblies, discreetly attired in short Venetian mantles of velvet or satin, which scarcely concealed the regulation evening dress beneath.

The fever for this spectacular form of entertainment had waned, like all other society fevers, after a time, and there had not been any remarkable ball of this kind for the last two or three years. The Baroness Clavaroche took upon herself to revive the taste. Her ball was to be a fancy ball, a masked ball, a ball of dominos, and strange disguises, and mystifications. Masks were not to be removed till supper, a tremendous banquet which was to be given in a temporary pavilion at the end of the garden, large enough to seat five hundred people, lighted by electricity, and said to cost twenty thousand francs—an erection which was to be carted away during to-morrow's daylight, and was to vanish almost as swiftly as a scene in a fairy spectacle at the

Porte Saint Martin, leaving only a big bill behind.

The dancing room had been Madame Clavaroche's especial care. Her ball was to be a ball of roses as well as of historic and fanciful costumes. She had reproduced that exquisite arrangement of the *salle des glaces* at Versailles which had been the admiration of Parisian society in fifty-five, when the great ball was given in honour of the Queen of England. Garlands of roses were suspended from the ceiling, crossing and recrossing each other in fantastic profusion, and from the rose garlands seemed to hang the crystal chandeliers. The mirrors were framed in roses, the doorways were festooned with roses, the orchestra was divided into four alcoves, or gilded cages, which filled the corners of the room, and the trellises which half concealed the musicians were wreathed with roses. It seemed as if all the rose-gardens of the South could hardly have furnished so many flowers.

CHAPTER VI.

‘AND THE FIRST BORN OF THE POOR SHALL FEED.’

ON that second of July—while Parisian society and all the pleasure-seekers from foreign lands were crowded into the Palace of Industry, where twenty thousand privileged spectators were seated around the Imperial throne, high on its dais of crimson velvet powdered with golden bees, amidst foliage and flowers and gigantic trophies of industry and art—Ishmael was enjoying a long quiet morning in the gardens of the old monastery beyond Marly-le-roi, beautiful exceedingly in the full flush of their midsummer glory, thousands of roses abloom in the old-fashioned parterres, magnolia trees weighed down by their heavy waxen chalices, breathing perfume, vivid masses of golden broom shining against a background of darkest foliage, long vistas of greenery, at the end of which sparkled far-off flashes of blue water. It seemed the home of poet or dreamer rather than of practical engineer, contractor, speculator in waste lands, millionaire.

Yet it is a fact that a man whose daily work is of a dry-as-dust order has often a fonder love of the country than your poet and dreamer, and Ishmael found in these gardens and groves of the old Benedictine monastery relief and refreshment after his Parisian life which seemed to renew his youth with every fresh visit. There was a deep, sweet pleasure, not untouched by sadness, in watching these joyous bands of children—childhood without a care—since these little waifs, gathered from the slum and the gutter while thought and memory were still dim, knew not of any world outside these gardens, or the country walks on which they were taken at rare intervals, for a treat. Of that foul world of Paris, the lanes and hovels of Ménilmontant and Villette, of Clichy and Montmâre, from which they had been rescued, they thought, if they ever thought of it at all, as a bad dream which had troubled their babyhood. This life here among leaves and flowers, and songs of birds, and blue sky, in spacious dormitories where the little white beds were purity personified, in lofty play-rooms where there were all the simple toys and games that can develop the grace and strength of healthy childhood, and awaken the mental powers with the mystifications and puzzles that

are the delight of children—this was the reality. That troubled and gloomy past, time of dark rooms and loathsome odours, mud, squalor, blows, hunger, was the dream.

It was noon, and Ishmael walked, book in hand, in one of those long leafy glades, a grassy walk between old Spanish chestnuts and flowering limes, with here and there a spreading oak that was supposed to have been planted in the time of King Dagobert. The book was a grave book, and needed to be read in supreme quiet, and at this hour there was not a sound in those groves and gardens except an occasional bird-call, and the hum of summer insects. Truly a quiet family these seven hundred and fifty children of the great contractor. But when in his pacing up and down Ishmael came to the upper end of the alley, which was only divided by a wide sweep of sunlit greensward from the great gray Gothic pile yonder with its widely opened windows, there fell upon his ear a sound as of the rolling of far distant waves, or the hum of Brobdignagian beetles—something vague, tremendous, almost awful, like the sound of nations furiously raging together, heard from afar.

This distant tumult was made by the voices of the children at their dinner hour, accompanied by

the rattle of busy knives and forks, the clatter of plates and dishes in rapid circulation. In almost all other schools and institutions in France the children dined in a solemn silence, and were made to understand that it was an offence to break the dumbness. Ishmael's children were allowed to talk as much as they liked, and they eat all their meals in a Babel of young voices; for Ishmael had been told that it was good for children to talk and laugh as they sat at table, and as his chief desire was not for order and quietude, but for the health and growth of his little ones, he allowed full freedom of speech. The children were not allowed to talk with full mouths: that offence against decency was put down with a high hand by the gray-robed sisters who walked briskly up and down, serving and watching, behind the long rows of diners. The children were so happy and so free that they took a pride in obeying their teachers, and there was an *esprit de corps* and a loyalty among these rescued ones which might put to shame many a famous public school.

Presently, instantaneously as it were, and with a great shrill chorus of shouting, indistinct, joyous as the songs of birds, the children came pouring out upon the great green lawn, almost

golden under the vertical sun—troops of girls in pink and white cotton—just such cotton as Pâquerette wore that day at Vincennes when she and Ishmael met for the first time—a serpentine band of girls, running, flying almost, making swiftest and most wonderful curves over the velvet turf—dark hair, fair hair waving in the summer breeze, and a chorus of laughter and joyous snatches of speech to make glad the heart of man—three hundred girls—children let loose suddenly into loveliest gardens, after a morning's easy lessons, and a good dinner. Could there be happiness upon this earth more perfect? Childhood that knows not care; childhood that never heard of want or debt; childhood with an army of p'ayfellows amidst a paradise of trees and flowers; and with no stern rules and regulations, and dictations and counter-dictations, and theories and counter-theories of an incompetent committee to turn the paradise into a prison.

This was what Ishmael had done for Pâquerette's sake, for the sake of the wife who had abandoned him, blighted his life, and almost broken his heart. He had at first designed a home for boys only, having discovered that in France philanthropy had done much more for the succour and protection of the weaker sex than of

the stronger; but on becoming owner of the spacious rambling old monastery, with ample space around for adding to its accommodation at his pleasure, he determined upon creating a home and a school for girls, who were to be admitted as infants, and who were not to leave till they were old enough and wise enough to enter upon the arena of life, fortified by a sound and useful education, and by the robust health which is the natural result of a well-fed, well-cared-for childhood. It was the recollection of Pâquerette's dismal girlhood in that stony well in the rue Sombreuil which prompted Ishmael to this extension of his original plan. Are not those pallid faces of girls and children in the back slums of a great city an everlasting appeal to the rich?—just as the hungry faces and gaunt figures in the streets at Christmas time seem to reproach the men and women in velvet and fur, going home to the roast turkey and plum pudding that have become a burden and a weariness of spirit by sheer satiety. Ishmael could not forget that ground-floor den in the faubourg, on a level with all the squalor and foulness of the yard, damp with the slime of ages. And there were many such yards in Paris; and, in a city of late years given over to the madness of strong drink, there

must needs be many such neglected children as Pâquerette.

It was such children as these that Ishmael and his agents collected, and brought home to the paradise at Marly. It was home verily, for they had known no other, and they could know no happier on this side of heaven.

The serpentine train of children stopped its evolutions all in a moment, the pink cotton frocks, dark hair and golden hair, tumbling over one another in a sudden confusion; and from those rosy lips there came a cry of wilder joy than had been heard before. The little girls had descried that tall figure in the leafy alley, the grave handsome face, and dark kind eyes watching them.

It was their patron and friend, Monsieur Chose. They all came tearing across the grass to greet him, a veritable Niagara of children. They clapped their hands, they shouted, they stamped their feet. ‘Monsieur Chose! Monsieur Chose! Monsieur Chose!’ they cried in shrillest treble—and this was their idea of a polite greeting.

Rarely was Monsieur Chose seen on this side of the old monastic grounds. He spent many a morning with the boys, teaching them, drilling them, giving them easy lectures on mechanics, taking them for long pilgrimages to the woods of

Marly, where he taught them more natural history in an hour than they could learn in a month from their books. With the boys he was a familiar friend, but here his presence was an event. With the girls he ranked as a demigod. They who knew nothing of Greek gods and heroes had a vague and dim idea that this man was something above common humanity, and that it was no sin to worship him.

‘Well, little ones,’ he said kindly, patting a golden head at his knee, and smiling across the broad ranks of eager faces, most of them open-mouthed and grinning; ‘you seem pleased to see me.’

But they only repeated, ‘Monsieur Chose ! Monsieur Chose ! Monsieur Chose !’ stamping their feet for accompaniment.

It was the rude eloquence of the masses, and Ishmael understood its meaning perfectly.

‘What do you want me to do for you, my children?’ he asked, seeing himself blockaded by a circle of childish heads, a circle that was momentarily becoming thicker and extending wider, as the three hundred assumed this fresh formation. ‘Am I to play one of your games with you—*Colin Maillard, par exemple ?*’

There was a pause of silence, an evident

hesitation, as if one impulse moved all those young minds, yet none of those young lips dared utter it. And then a tiny voice, close to Ishmael's knee lisped :

‘Tell us a story, Monsieur Chose.’

Whereupon followed shrillest of choruses, ‘A story, a story, a story, Monsieur Chose!’ Cendrillon, the White Cat, Fortunio, the whole round of Perrault and Madame d'Aulnoy, each child naming her favourite legend.

On certain memorable occasions Ishmael had told these children some of the old fairy tales, a treat never to be forgotten.

He looked at his watch.

‘Do you know that I want to go back to Paris by an early train?’ he said.

They did not know, and they did not care a straw. They worshipped him, but his convenience was of not the slightest consequence to them. They only repeated, ‘Please tell us a story, Monsieur Chose!’ ‘Don't go back to Paris, Monsieur Chose!’ ‘The White Cat, please, Monsieur Chose!’ ‘The Little Red Hood, please, Monsieur Chose!’ with infinite variations.

‘It would be hard to refuse you, my little ones,’ he said, and he crossed the lawn, followed and surrounded by the infantine herd, till he came

to a rustic bench under a fine old cedar. Here he seated himself, and the children all sat down on the grass at his feet. That tiny fair-haired child of two and a half—she who had been the first to give utterance to the wish of all the others,—clambered on to the bench and nestled against his arm, with her pale gold curls almost in his waistcoat. She had no respect of persons, this baby waif from one of the Communistic quarters of Paris.

Ishmael told them the story of the little girl in the red hood who was on the verge of being eaten by a wolf. He took care to effect her rescue at the crisis, lest infantile slumbers should be haunted by that direful tragedy. That wolf in the story, told close upon bed-time by loving mothers or good-natured nurses, has been the author of many a bad dream under baby brows. Better far the tale of Cendrillon, with its happy ending, its poetical justice; better the Sleeping Beauty, the White Cat, anything than those two visions of horror—Bluebeard and Red-Riding-Hood.

The bell ringing for vespers at four o'clock warned Ishmael that he had wasted hours among these babies. Those long legs of his would have to stride their fastest to reach the distant station by six. He kept no carriage or saddle-horse at the Home,

only a couple of springless carts and a pair of sturdy *percherons* to fetch provisions from Versailles or Marly.

It was seven o'clock when he reached the great city, half-past seven when he entered the Place Royale, whose leafy dulness was in no wise affected by the commotion at the other end of Paris. The sober old arcades in front of the houses, unchanged since the days of Louis the Thirteenth, when the rank and fashion of Paris lived here, looked as solemn as a cloister in the summer evening. The limes and chestnuts cast their dark shadows on the ground, so rarely trodden by hurrying footsteps, paced in leisurely fashion by the grave and the contemplative. Here Richelieu lived, and here Marion de Lorme. One of those fine red houses is sacred as having been once the home of Victor Hugo. In another lived for awhile that meteoric genius Rachel. She sleeps not very far from her old home, in the Jewish quarter at Père Lachaise.

A man who had been pacing from fountain to fountain with a weary air for the last half-hour, descried Ishmael as he turned the corner of the Place, and came out into the road quickly to meet him. It was Theodore de Valnois, otherwise Dumont.

‘I have some news for you,’ he said.

‘What! you have returned from Valparaiso then?—always supposing you have been there.’

‘Polite?’ muttered Dumont. ‘Did I not write to you from that place?’

‘I got sundry letters from you with the Valparaiso postmark,’ answered Ishmael, scanning him coolly; ‘but as you asked for your money to be sent to a friend in the Boulevard St. Michel—in order, as you said, that it should be forwarded to you by a securer medium than the post—I confess to having had my doubts as to the reality of your voyage to Chili.’

‘Fatal tendency in the mind of the rich man always to think evil of his poorer brother,’ said Dumont, with a sinister sparkle in his almond-shaped eyes, contemplating his employer furtively between half-closed lids, an evil light lurking in the midst of a network of wrinkles, like a spider in the middle of his web. ‘Fortunately for me, Monsieur Ishmael, my honour and honesty in this little transaction are not dependent upon my own unsupported testimony. I have the evidence of a sailor on board the packet that brought me back to France, and that sailor is the man from whom I have obtained the very information in search of which I went to Valparaiso, and for

which you offered me a certain and a very moderate price.’

Ishmael paled, and his breath grew shorter, as he looked at the man searchingly, suspiciously, in the clear soft light of the summer evening, the sun sloping westward above the spires and domes of aristocratic Paris.

‘You have heard something—definite—about my wife,’ he said, his voice husky with emotion, which even his strong will could not master. So much—his fate, the history of his life in the days to come—depended upon the nature of the news which this man was to give him.

‘Yes.’

‘Living—or dead?’

‘Dead.’

‘You have brought back documentary evidence—the *acte de décès*?’

‘No; but I have got you living evidence, in the person of a sailor who was on board the vessel on which Madame Ishmael died, who saw her remains thrown into the sea.’

‘She died at sea?’

‘Yes.’

‘Alone?’

‘Alone.’

‘He had deserted her then, that scoundrel!’

muttered Ishmael; 'the villain who took a base advantage of her childlike nature—turned to guilt and shame a creature that heaven designed for innocence—a soul without one impure instinct.'

They were walking slowly side by side under the old arcade, in front of Ishmael's door. There was no one about to mark their countenances or to overhear their speech; nor was there anything in the tone or look of either man to startle a passer-by. Life and death can be so spoken of, with lowered voices, with grave faces.

'If you want to know the whole truth about Madame Ishmael's death you had better go with me to this Spanish sailor's lodging, and hear the story from his lips. The man is a rascal, I daresay: most of these fellows are rascals. They are not reared or educated or treated in a way to breed angels. But he can have no motive for lying about this matter, no motive for deceiving you.'

'How do I know that?' asked Ishmael.

'There goes the rich man's suspicion again. "Has he not *you* at his back?" you say within yourself. "You who are poverty personified, and therefore a past-master of treachery. *You* may have bribed him, you may have taught him. *You*, Laurent Dumont, whom I employ because

it suits my purpose, but whom I suspect at every turn!” That is the kind of thing lurking in your thoughts, no doubt.’

‘Something like that, perhaps. However, I will see this Spanish sailor of yours. There can be no harm in that.’

‘None. And you can judge for yourself; you can make your own conclusions from what you hear and see.’

‘Be sure I shall do that. Am I to understand that you found out nothing for yourself at Valparaiso, and that your sole discovery was made on the voyage home, from this sailor?’

‘It almost comes to that. I saw the proprietor of the café-concert, at which your wife sang—a Frenchman, and civil enough. He remembered Madame Ishmael perfectly, though not by that name. She was Mademoiselle Bonita at his establishment. He praised her beauty, her *chic*, her bird-like voice. He told me that her health broke down after three or four months in a tropical climate, and she was obliged to leave off singing. She left the city soon after in a ship the name of which he remembered, chiefly because she was a wretched Chilian tub which seldom carried passengers, and because he himself had tried to prevent Mademoiselle Bonita sailing in her. But the

poor soul was in a feverish hurry to get back to France. She was alone—friendless—with very little money, and she caught at the first chance of a cheap voyage. She was to pay the captain of this merchant vessel about a third of the passenger-rate by one of the first-class steamers.’

‘He had abandoned her, then—left her to her fate in a strange city. Did your café-concert keeper tell you about *him*?’

‘No; he seemed to know very little, and I did not care to ask leading questions, for her sake.’

‘That was discreet. But it shall be my duty to find him, even at the eleventh hour. If she is dead, so much the more reason for retribution. No, he shall not escape my just wrath, not even at the last. Go on with your story.’

‘The Chilian ship in which your wife sailed was a barque carrying copper, and called the “Loro.” She was bound for Havre, and to Havre I took my passage by steamer, hoping at Havre to be able to take up the broken thread. Madame Ishmael was very ill when she left Valparaiso: there might be some official connected with the harbour at Havre who would remember the landing of a pretty young woman—an invalid, and alone, from a ship which carried only two

or three passengers. But before I was half-way across the sea I had discovered all that remained to be told about your wife's fate. Leaning over the taffrail one moonlit night, smoking and listening to the talk of a group of sailors clustered round one of their mates who had been on the sick list for some time, I heard the mention of a ship called the ‘Loro.’ This was enough to put me on the scent. It was the invalid sailor who named that ship. I took an early opportunity of questioning him, and from him I heard the story of your wife's last voyage, and her grave in the sea. I need tell you no more. You had better hear the details at first hand, from the sailor himself. He is in Paris, where I brought him. He has not many days' life in him, and if his deposition be worth anything, you had better get it without delay. You can have it from his own lips.’

‘Yes, that will be best. I can see him this evening, you say?’

‘At once, if you will come with me.’

‘I must dine first. I will meet you later. Where does the man live?’

‘Not in a very pleasant neighbourhood; but as your business with him is a matter of importance you will not mind that. If I had had

my own way I should have taken him to the hospital; but he had an old chum in Paris, and insisted on going to share his den. He lodges in the Cité Jeanne D'Arc, by the Barrière d'Italie. But you might have some difficulty in finding the room if you went there without a guide, so if you name your hour I will meet you at *le Chat Blanc* in the Avenue des Gobelins. The Cité Jeanne D'Arc is within a quarter of an hour's walk.'

Ishmael looked at his watch.

'I will be there at half-past eight,' he said.

'That gives you only three quarters of an hour in all,' answered Dumont; 'not much time for dinner.'

'My dinner will be a speedy business. *Au revoir.*'

He dismissed his agent with a nod, and turned towards his own door. But Dumont was not inclined to leave him without one more question.

He followed his patron to the doorstep, and laid his hand upon Ishmael's sleeve.

'If I prove the fact of your wife's death to your satisfaction by means of this Spaniard's deposition, you will not withhold the reward you promised?' he asked.

Ishmael turned upon him indignantly.

‘Am I the kind of man to break my word?’ he asked.

‘No, no; of course not,’ answered the other, ‘for you can afford to keep it. Honour and honesty are luxuries which rich men need not deny themselves.’

Ishmael shut his door, and Dumont strolled away towards the rue Saint Antoine, thoughtful, anxious even, yet feeling that up to this point things were going smoothly for him.

‘It has been a troublesome business,’ he told himself, ‘and will be difficult to carry neatly through to the finish, for this Ishmael is no fool. But it is easier and safer than a forged *acte de décès*. My kinsman is right. It is not a pleasant thing to go back to the *bagne*: I had enough of that free gymnasium thirty years ago. It hardened my muscles, and braced my limbs; but it planted a worm in the core of my heart, a worm that has never died, and never will while that heart beats—the inexorable hatred of my fellow-men.’

Ishmael’s dinner was the briefest business, for he was too much disturbed in mind to take more than a crust of bread and a tumbler of wine. His real motive in postponing his visit to

the Cité Jeanne d'Arc was the desire to arm himself with a small American revolver, before entering a neighbourhood which was perhaps more familiar to him than to Dumont. In the course of his long labours in the cause of the working population of Paris he had taken pains to inspect all the principal settlements of poverty within the fortifications; and this Cité Jeanne d'Arc he knew to be one of the very worst, a standing disgrace and dishonour to a civilised country, more hideous and revolting in its filth and squalor than the vilest concatenation of reeded hovels ever inhabited by sweltering blackamoors in an African swamp, or the foulest village street in Turkey or Persia. He had inspected the Cité Jeanne d'Arc, and had protested against its horrors in the public papers; he had taken its construction and its architecture, its ventilation, drainage, and water supply, as an admirable example of what ought not to be permitted in any pig-stye or cattle-shed: how much less in any human dwelling! He had lifted up his voice in high places against this terrible instance of man's inhumanity to man; but there are vested interests in Paris as well as in London, and the Cité Jeanne d'Arc with its fifteen hundred apartments, giving shelter to fifteen hundred

different families, still cumbered the ground yonder on the southward side of Paris.

What infamy, what treason, might not be reasonably expected in such a place? A brave man is never foolhardy. Ishmael had a little revolver which he kept expressly—like an old hat or a pair of strong boots—for explorations in doubtful neighbourhoods, and he wore it in a fashion of his own. He attached the pistol to a leather strap, fastened round his wrist, and carried it snugly concealed up the sleeve of his coat. In the moment of danger his weapon was in his hand in a moment, ready for action. There was no fumbling in breast or in pocket, no movement which could be stopped or anticipated by the foe. In a breath the pistol slid into its place, and his finger was on the trigger, ready to fire.

He drove to the Avenue des Gobelins, odorous of tanners' yards and workshops, and stopped at a somewhat disreputable looking café-restaurant, on the pavement in front of which there was a colony of small iron tables. Dumont was seated at one of them with the regulation *carafon* of brandy and a syphon of *eau de seltz* at his elbow.

He paid the waiter, and was ready to accom-

pany Ishmael in a minute. The summer dusk was deepening, the sky was crimson behind the great white archway and the gilded dome, the fountains and statues far away to the west. The lamps were lighted in the shabby cafés and shops round about, as Ishmael and his companion walked across a region of waste places and scattered houses which has since undergone considerable alteration, to the Cité Jeanne d'Arc.

‘You seem to know the way,’ said Dumont.

‘There are very few of the slums of Paris in which I do not know my way,’ answered Ishmael.

‘Ah, I remember. You have gone in for the amelioration of the workman’s surroundings, the elevation of his mind by means of whitewash and spring water. You have found it hard work, I’m afraid.’

‘I have found it very hard work. Unhappily the initial difficulty lies with the workman himself. He has, for the most part, a hereditary love of dirt, the fault of bad legislation and dishonest landlords who have left him to wallow in the mire from generation to generation, until the mire has become his natural element. He has another fault, which is a rooted disinclination to do anything on his own part for the improvement of his surroundings, were it so much as to knock in a nail, or sweep

down a cobweb. He looks to the landlord for everything; and as, in a general way, the landlord does nothing, the result is—such a place as this.’

They were on the threshold of the Cité Jeanne d’Arc. They stood, with a momentary hesitation, at the end of a shallow canal of mud, once a paved way, but from which the paving stones had long been rooted up, and which was now a channel where the inhabitants flung their refuse of all kinds, where the housewife emptied her pail and the laundress her tub. On either side this dismal gulf stood a pile of building, gray, gloomy, prison-like in the midsummer twilight, rising stage above stage, blank, and flat and monotonous in form, to the slated roof, a dead wall, as of a jail, pierced with windows of the same unornamental pattern, windows in which shattered panes, straw, and newspapers were the rule.

Through the mud and filth of this canal Ishmael waded after his guide to a door half way down the alley. Here Dumont entered, and led the way up a staircase, provided with the usual rope instead of a bannister rail. On every story there was a narrow passage, entirely without light or ventilation, leading to the different apartments, in each of which a family was lodged. In some cases panels had been knocked out of the doors,

or had dropped out from sheer rottenness and decay. In many windows glass was entirely absent, other casements were immovable in their frames by reason of the broken condition of the iron fastenings. Health, cleanliness, decency were alike impossible in such dwelling places ; but had these huge caravansari been planned in the first instance as a hotbed for vice and crime, for discontent and revolution, the arrangements could not have been better adapted for the purpose in view.

The two men mounted slowly, cautiously, groping their way up the dilapidated stairs to the fourth story, and then, still groping along the narrow passage, to a door at the end, which Dumont opened without ceremony.

The window, with almost every pane shattered, faced the west, and the last gleams of the sunset showed red athwart the rotten framework, through which came the first untainted air that Ishmael had breathed since he entered the barrack. Against the wall stood an iron bedstead, upon which a man was lying, dressed in shirt and trousers, with bare brown feet showing beyond the piece of sacking which served as a coverlet, and with a sailor's scarlet cap upon his raven black hair—a Spaniard evidently. So far Dumont had spoken the truth.

There was another man in the room, seated at a table near the bed, playing some game at cards by himself, by the light of a single candle stuck in an old claret bottle. He, too, looked like a Spaniard and a sailor.

'Has he been any worse since I left you?' asked Dumont of this man.

'No worse, the same always. As weak as a baby, and drowsy, *tiene sueño, tiene muchísimo sueño.*

'I must try to rouse him for a short time, at any rate,' said Dumont. 'You can go and smoke a cigar in the passage, *amigo*, while Monsieur talks to your mate. It will not be long.'

He offered his case to the Spaniard, whose dirty claw-like fingers snatched at a couple of trabucos greedily. Not often did such luxuries come his way, and he shuffled out to the dark, dirty corridor in supreme content.

'Fernando, awake!' said Dumont, taking hold of the sleeping sailor's shoulder, and shaking him gently.

'Is it not rather dangerous to awaken a dying man?' asked Ishmael, looking intently at the Spaniard's statuesque face.

'He would sleep himself into the grave if we did not rouse him now and then to force food or

drink upon him—a few spoonfuls of soup, or a little wine and water,’ answered Dumont. ‘There is no use standing upon *punctilio*. He cannot live long, and when he dies the secret of your wife’s fate will die with him.’

‘How is that?’

‘Because he is the only survivor of the crew of the ship on board which she died.’

‘The ship was wrecked, then?’

‘Yes; and this was the only man saved.’

‘What is the matter with him?’

‘Heaven knows. General decay, perhaps. The doctor who sometimes visits this den has looked at him, shaken his head, and gone his way. Nothing to be done.’

He had been trying to rouse the sailor all through this conversation, and at last succeeded. The man lifted his heavy eyelids, and looked with dim, dreamy eyes at the two faces bent over him. His own face was marble-white as the countenance of death itself, and almost expressionless.

‘This is the husband of the young woman who died on board the “Loro,”’ said Dumont. ‘I want you to tell him the circumstances of her death, and what happened afterwards.’

The Spaniard stared vaguely, like a man who cannot follow the drift of what he hears.

‘Stay!’ said Ishmael, ‘before you question him further, it would be well to have another witness. Is there any one you can summon more respectable than that fellow who went out just now?’

Dumont shrugged his shoulders.

‘In this aviary the birds are all of the hawk tribe,’ he said.

‘And do both these sailors understand French?’

‘Both.’

‘Then you had better call the friend back. You can take down the Spaniard’s deposition, and his friend can witness it.’

‘Good.’

He opened the door and called, ‘Pedro! you are wanted,’ and Pedro came strolling in with his first cigar half smoked. ‘If Monsieur has no objection,’ he said, and went on smoking, nodding his acquiescence when Dumont told him for what he was wanted.

There was considerable difficulty in rousing the dormant consciousness of the sick sailor, but at last, by repeating the words ‘Loro,’ shipwreck, Valparaiso, Dumont succeeded in penetrating the clouded brain: the dull eyes showed a faint gleam of intelligence, the blue lips moved slowly. ‘On board the “Loro”—yes—there was a young

woman—alone—very sad—a woman who sat in a corner of the deck all day, and wept often, when she thought no one was looking. We had a bad passage, stormy and long, and when we had been at sea three weeks the young woman fell ill of a fever. There was only one other woman on board—the captain's wife—and she was sea-sick and frightened, and too ill to look after the girl who was down with fever. They found her dead in her berth one morning. She was a singer called La Bonita. She was thrown into the sea at sunset, off Cape Horn. The captain made an entry in his log; but within three days we struck upon a rock near the Falklands, and ship, and log, and captain were all at the bottom of the sea four hours afterwards. I got off in one of the boats with the captain's wife, and son, a poor little lad of nine, weak and sickly. We were out four days and nights before we were picked up by a French steamer, bound for Buenos Ayres. The captain's wife died before we got into port, from the consequences of exposure to the sea and the weather, and the boy died in the hospital soon after.'

This story, told slowly, disjointedly, but still plain enough in its facts, was listened to with grave and gloomy attention by Ishmael. He

heard, but he heard with doubt and suspicion. Such a story was easily told. Such events have often happened—might have happened in this case, just as the sailor had related them. A woman might have died of fever on board a ship called the 'Loro,' and none but this Spanish sailor might remain to tell her fate. But how could he, Ishmael, be sure that the woman who so died, was his wife Pâquerette? It was to Dumont's interest to trump up some plausible story, in order to earn the promised reward.

'Are you convinced?' asked Dumont presently, looking up from the sheet of paper on which he had written the sailor's statement, while Ishmael sat silent, with bent brows.

'Not altogether. Granted that this man's story is true. How can I be sure that the woman who died on board the "Loro" was my wife?'

'Friend Fernando was curious enough to provide himself with a memorial of her existence, which may, perhaps, convince you,' answered Dumont. 'He felt keenly interested in that lonely passenger, and after her death he went into her cabin and possessed himself of the few poor treasures she had left--some trinkets of trifling value, and a packet of letters. He had them hidden in his shirt at the time of the

wreck. The trinkets he sold at Buenos Ayres, the letters he has under his pillow to-night. Would you like to see them?’

‘Yes.’

Dumont groped under the wretched apology for a pillow, and produced a little packet of letters, which looked as if it had been steeped in sea water.

The writing was all blurred and blotted, but Ishmael knew that neat, small penmanship, that gilt coronet and cypher in the corner of the paper, only too well. Slowly, and with darkening brow he looked over the letters. They bore the date of the fatal year in his life—the year that had taken away his brothers and given him back his inheritance—the year that had robbed him of wife and of friend. They were the seducer’s letters to his victim—Faust to Marguerite, Mephistoles standing at his shoulder and guiding his pen.

Ishmael put the letters into his pocket, and took out a handful of gold which he thrust into the Spaniard’s clammy hand. The eyelids had sunk again upon the marble cheeks, and he was breathing heavily, slowly.

‘It would have been only justice if I had killed that man,’ said Pâquerette’s husband.

Dumont read over the statement, which the Spaniard Pedro signed as witness. Ishmael opened his pocket-book, and counted out the promised reward in notes, which he handed to Dumont.

‘You are satisfied?’ asked the agent.

‘Yes, I am satisfied. The story is sad, and strange; but after all it is not incredible that she should die thus—abandoned, and alone.’

He took up his hat to go.

‘If this man is dying, and the doctor can do no more for him, he ought at least to see a priest,’ he said. ‘I will send a good *curé* whom I know to talk to him.’

‘I am afraid it will be wasted trouble for you and the *curé*,’ answered Dumont carelessly. ‘My friend Fernando is a difficult subject when he is awake. But you must please yourself. Shall I go back to the Avenue des Gobelins with you?’

‘There’s no occasion: I can find my way.’

CHAPTER VII.

‘FOR, LO! THE WINTER IS PAST.’

It was nearly eleven o'clock. The lamps and Chinese lanterns of the festival in the Legitimist quarter made a glow of light above the roofs and dormers of the sombre old houses, like the lurid glare of a conflagration; while on every gust of summer wind there floated the music of a military band, softened by distance. The pavement in front of the Clavaroche mansion was crowded with idlers, waiting to see the carriages drive in through the broad gateway, idlers who remarked audibly upon the costumes of the maskers, and tried to guess their identity. The Baroness Clavaroche, gorgeous in a gown of yellow satin and *point de Venise*, was stationed in the vestibule of her *salon* of roses, an octagon room lined with palms and tropical ferns, the rich bloom of cactus, Cape jasmine, and orange flowers, receiving her guests as they filed past her to the ball-room.

There were no announcements, mystification

being the chief feature of the festival. The guests handed their cards of invitation to the groom of the chambers, who threw them into a gigantic Oriental bowl on a carved ebony stand, which stood near the chief entrance. The Baroness alone was unmasked. But later in the evening, when the duty of receiving her guests was over, she too was to have her share in the general bewilderment, provided always that in sharp-eyed Paris there was a single mortal incapable of recognising that Flemish torso, and the peculiar setting on of the fair Flemish head.

Baron Clavaroche, a fish very much out of water in the midst of the masked crowd, moved slowly to and fro among the throng in sober evening dress, over which, to satisfy his wife's fancy, he had consented to wear a small Venetian mantle of gold-embroidered brocade. He wore the Legion of Honour, with its eagle in diamonds, not long received from the Imperial hand; and as he circulated among his guests, masked among the crowd of other masks, he had the felicity of hearing himself, his wife, and his fortunes discussed in the free and easy way in which friends talk of each other under such circumstances. There is something in the very act of giving a grand entertainment which seems to put a man and woman out of court, as it were. Every

one finds something to criticise, something to condemn, something to grumble about. There is nothing so good that it might not have been better ; there are no arrangements so perfect as to be without a hitch somewhere ; and then comes the chorus of complainings :—‘ Did you ever see anything so badly managed as the entrance for the carriages ? ’ ‘ We waited at least an hour. ’ ‘ That avalanche of roses must have cost a fortune ! ’ ‘ Nothing to people who make money by the wholesale ruin of their fellow-creatures, as old Bourley made his. ’ ‘ He was at the bottom of the Mexican loan. ’ ‘ Morny. ’ ‘ Jecker. ’ ‘ Highway robbery under a new name. ’ ‘ The Baron himself had not a sou. ’ ‘ Married him for the sake of his title. ’ ‘ The supper is to be in a marquee at the end of the garden, five minutes’ walk. ’ ‘ Pleasant, if the night should be wet. ’ ‘ Every sign of a thunderstorm. ’ ‘ Electric light sure to be a failure. ’ ‘ They narrowly escaped a *fiasco* at the ball at the Tuileries. Rather a daring experiment for Madame Clavaroche. ’ ‘ My dear, that woman’s whole career is an experiment. ’

These were the rags and scraps of conversation which greeted the master of the house as he moved restlessly from pillar to post, now gazing upward at the festoons of summer roses, the dazzling crystal

chandeliers, the innumerable wax candles, thinking of what his mother would have suffered could she have seen the desecration of those noble old rooms, this riotous luxury, this wild expenditure on flowers and candles and decorations which would be swept away to the rubbish-heap to-morrow—she who had counted every sou, yet who at her poorest had scrupulously set apart the tenth of her income for charity, and had often exceeded that amount at the cost of her own comfort, nay, of almost the necessities of life. And withal, she had been cheerful, and had delighted in those gray, grave old rooms, and the few grave and gray old friends who occasionally assembled there.

He thought of those parties of the past, to-night, while the waltz of maskers swept past him like a mountain torrent, and the solid old oak floor seemed to rock under that rythmical tread. He remembered the little knot of elderly men and women grouped in front of the old hearth yonder, now hidden behind a sloping bank of Provence roses. He recalled the slow, measured speech, the political discussions, the prophecies of impending doom for this Imperial *simulacrum*, which seemed so fair and sound, and yet was hollow and rotten, and on the point of falling like a palace built out of a pack of cards. So, at least,

the worthy adherents of Henri Cinq had gone on protesting for the last fifteen years. And now they were all dispersed, those shadows of the past; and the children of the Empire filled the room with their garish mirth, their turbulent pleasure.

They flew in circles past him, a whirlpool of colour and brightness, a phantasmagoria of strange figures—Watteau shepherdesses, Mexican post-boys, Turkish generals, Spanish bull fighters, Swiss cowherds, Chinese mandarins, gipsies from wild strange lands between the Danube and the Baltic, *polichinelles*, *feu-follets*, *debardeurs*, postillions of Longjumeau, brigands, coolies, abbés, sweeps, skeletons, harlequins, misers, Jews, sailors, demons—all revolving, circulating, changing places, like the chips of coloured glass in a kaleidoscope.

The Baron crept away from the ball-room in despair. He wandered through those lace-draped doorways, under festoons of roses, wondering where they had carried the good old panelled doors, whether perchance they had been carted off to be burned, as something *demodé* in the way of architecture, and whether he was henceforth to live in a house without doors. No new change could surprise him, after the changes that

had already taken place. His wife's taste and his wife's money had so transformed the good old house that there was not within its walls a single spot on which the Baron could rest the sole of his foot, without having his old habits, his old associations outraged by the novelty of his surroundings. The violins and violoncellos, the flutes and hautboys sank into silence within their gilded cages, and that maelstrom of dancers and colours, gold and glitter, ceased its wild revolving. The dancers dispersed slowly in adjoining rooms, or in the garden, where the summer moon was shining on a smooth lawn, on flower beds and fountains, and on the great crimson and white marquee yonder, which was to open its doors at one o'clock precisely for supper.

‘Do you know if Lady Constance Danetree is here?’ asked a Watteau columbine of a Mexican post-boy, on whose arm she leant, as they paced the velvet lawn.

‘I have not seen her yet.’

‘Do you think you would know her in a mask?’

‘Do I think I should know Juno if I met her on the boulevard? Lady Constance has a walk and an air that no man with an eye for beauty could possibly mistake.’

‘You admire her very much,’ said the columbine, with a faint sigh.

She was one of the prettiest little figures in the show, dressed all in white and pale gray, like a china figure in *biscuit* and *gris-de-flandres*, powdered wig, white shoes, white frock, white gloves, with touches of gray satin here and there, and a gray velvet bodice that fitted the plump supple figure as the rind fits the peach.

The post-boy looked down at her with a mischievous smile playing round the corners of his moustachiod lips. The black velvet mask left the mouth uncovered.

‘I think she is the handsomest women in Paris,’ he said; ‘but not half so fascinating as a certain little woman I know, who has much less pretension to absolute beauty, but who is *pourrie de chic*.’

‘She is very charming,’ said the columbine, whose every-day name was Amélie Jarzé, relieved by this avowal; ‘I am devoted to her. Is it not strange she does not marry?’

‘*L’embarras du choix*,’ answered the post-boy, otherwise Armand de Kératry. ‘She might marry anyone, and so she marries no one.’

Armand and Amélie had been closer friends than ever since their adventure in the quartier

Latin. It is wonderful how a little escapade of that kind ripens friendship. There was a secret between them, which served as a link. They could not hear of the Vicomte's poetry without exchanging stolen glances, or hiding together in corners to laugh at their ease. The mere sight of the little man, with his faultless gloves and boots, his mean little sallow face and intolerable airs, set Amélie and Armand in a mutual fever of fun. And after a fortnight of this stolen amusement, Armand de Keratry found out all at once that he had had enough of a bachelor's life in Paris; that the existence was as *banal* as it was costly; that it would be an absolute economy to marry; and that Amélie Jarzé, who had most of the faults and follies of her age and epoch, redeemed by good temper and high spirits, was the one young woman in all Paris whom he would like to marry.

His proposal was welcomed by Monsieur and Madame Jarzé, who had known him for years. He was not rich, but he had enough for existence, even in Paris; and he had expectations. Had there been any prospect of a higher bid for her younger daughter, Madame Jarzé's heart would have hardened itself to stone. But this being the best chance that had offered itself after three

years of active enterprise in the husband-hunting line, Madame Jarzé melted into tears, and drew the young man to her *moiré* antique bosom before he was aware.

‘That child has always adored you,’ she murmured.

‘Do you really think so?’ faltered Armand, who liked to imagine a tender little soul looking up to him with secret worship, watching for his smiles, living upon his kind words. ‘Do you know, I had an idea at one time that Amélie was very much taken by your wealthy friend, Monsieur Ishmael.’

‘My dear Armand! How *could* you?’ exclaimed his future mother-in-law, who was already speculating on the *corbeille*, and thinking of the letters *de faire part*. ‘A man of at least seven and thirty--nearly old enough to be her father.’

Armand glanced at Monsieur Jarzé, gray, wrinkled, with a figure inclining to that of Punch, and thought there was a good deal of difference between the hypothetical parent and the real article.

The arrangement was ratified--the *dot* agreed. It would be a drain upon the paternal resources, and might involve an appeal to the private purse of the Emperor, a man of almost fabulous generosity to his dependents. But to see that

cockle-shell bark, his younger daughter, moored in a safe haven, Monsieur Jarzé would have undertaken a task infinitely more difficult.

And now Amélie hung upon her lover's arm with the proud sense of proprietorship. She was no longer a *de noiselle à marier*, with keen eye ever on the watch for the chance of the moment, the sudden opportunity to lead a worthy victim captive. She had secured her victim, almost unawares, and he wore his chains as if he liked them. That light nature of hers was easily made happy. A month ago she had been miserable because Ishmael did not care for her. She had told herself that in losing the chance of a magnificent establishment she had also lost the one man of all others whom she could truly and fondly love. And now she told herself that the one man whom she had truly and fondly loved from the very dawn of girlhood was the man who was to be her husband, and that her romantic admiration of Ishmael had been a mere caprice, a girlish whim, of no real significance.

To-night, assured that her costume was a success, she felt that there was nothing wanting in her cup of bliss. She would not be rich as Armand's wife, but she could be aristocratic. She would be Amélie de Keratry. That ‘de’

made amends for much. She had always hated the plebeian sound of Jarzé, *tout court*.

Not so happy was poor Hortense amidst the roses and the lights, the glitter and dazzle of the *fête*. Clad in a flowing robe of purest white, with classic sandals, a wreath of oak-leaves on her classic head, an oak bough in her hand, she represented a Grecian sibyl. It was a pretty dress in the abstract, and it became Hortense Jarzé's style of beauty, but it was not a good costume for a fancy ball. The short skirts and neat ankles, the columbines, and Pierrottes, and *petits chaperons rouges*, and *bergères* and *débardeuses* had it all their own way in the dance; and as there were a good many wallflowers among the *petits crevés*, young-old men who vowed that they had given up dancing ages ago, the dancers could take their choice in the motley crowd of dames and damsels, all masked, and therefore all on equal terms as to beauty. It was form and pace that told at Madame Clavaroche's ball.

Vainly had Hortense sought her poet amidst the throng. That small, frail figure might well be lost in such a crowd. And the Vicomte had left his intentions doubtful—would not say whether he would or would not be present. He stigmatized the whole business as a folly—a mere

parade and manifesto on the part of a vain, purse-proud woman, who wanted all Paris to talk about her and her house.

'No doubt she thinks I shall celebrate her ball in a poem,' he said; 'send her down to posterity as the giver of the prettiest fête of the epoch.'

'It would make a charming poem,' said Hortense; 'the crowd of strange costumes of all nations—the music, and flowers, and summer night—the mystery of masked faces. Do go to the ball, if it were only for the sake of writing about it.'

The Vicomte mused for a moment, and then shook his head.

'It would not be worth the trouble,' he said. 'My muse is not inspired by *chiffons*.'

'But *chiffons* rule the world in our day,' argued Hortense, who knew the poet's thirst for renown. 'Granted that such a subject is beneath your pen, yet you must know that a poem of that kind, full of personalities, would set all Paris talking about the author.'

'It might,' mused Pontchartrain, twirling the pointed end of his moustache with those delicately tapering fingers. 'People always talk most about bagatelles. What a wonderful knowledge of the world you have, Mademoiselle Jarzé.'

‘I have been obliged to endure my life in it for the last five years,’ she answered, wearily.

And now the sibyl was there, but had not as yet discovered her Apollo. It was some time after midnight when Lady Constance Danetree’s coupé drove under the porch. She had come very late, caring little about the festival, and anxious to avoid the block of carriages. She looked superb in a Venetian costume of dark red velvet, gold brocade, and black fur, a robe such as Titian or Moroni would have loved to paint. The ruff of old Italian point opened just wide enough to show the noble curve of the throat, and was clasped by a large square emerald, of fabulous value, set with black pearls. Monsieur de Keratry had been right when he said that a black velvet mask would go but a very little way towards disguising such a woman as Constance Danetree. There were not three women in Paris whose heads were set upon their shoulders with such a queenlike grace. The figure and bearing of this daughter of Erin were altogether exceptional. No mask could hide, no crowd efface her. Other masks flocked round her as soon as she appeared in the ball-room. Every one recognised her. One man told her that she was either Titian’s Queen of Cyprus or Lady Constance Danetree. She was entreated to dance.

‘Venetian matrons did not waltz,’ she answered.

‘No, their little amusements were of a more serious kind. They played at poisoning, and made Aqua Tofana as modern children made toffee. But that is no reason why Lady Constance Danetree should not honour one of the most devoted among her slaves,’ urged an Abbé, with powdered hair and diamond shoe-buckles.

‘I am not Constance Danetree, but a noble Venetian of the sixteenth century, and I have never learnt the dances of the second French Empire,’ she answered sailing past him, with a gracious bend of the beautiful head, undisguised by any ornament save a single string of pearls twisted among the massive plaits.

She mingled with the crowd which lined the ball-room, leaving only a central space for the dancers, and moved slowly onward, pausing from time to time to talk to friends, or to watch the waltzers.

And now a new sensation made itself evident among the throng. A suppressed titter, subjugated as much as possible for decency’s sake, circulated in that hall of fading roses, and glittering crystals, and myriad wax candles beginning to bend and gutter in their sockets in an atmosphere rapidly

becoming tropical. A figure, unseen till a few minutes ago, had inspired the whole room with a sudden sense of the ridiculous.

It was a female figure, suggestive of Rubens and the Louvre, recalling an apotheosis of Marie de Medicis; yet still more vividly recalling the nearer image of the Belle Helène. It was a lady in the full maturity of a Flemish beauty, fat, fair and thirty, clad as the world is accustomed to see ladies clad across the footlights—but rarely without that intervening rampart. A woman on the stage is sacred as a priestess by an altar. She belongs to the world of art. She is a figure in a picture. She loses her individuality, and is only a part of a whole. But a woman parading a ball-room on a level with the eye, rubbing shoulders with the crowd, is only a woman; and in her case there is no excuse for a sin against womanly delicacy.

‘*Tiens!*’ cried a toreador as the lady passed, leaning on the arm of an ambassador, ‘*la belle Helène!*’

‘*Helène,*’ said another; ‘*mais pas trop belle.*’

‘*Quelle brassée de chair humaine,*’ whispered a Pierrot.

‘*C’est plus Schneider que Schneider,*’ muttered a Roumanian gipsy.

The fair being sailed on triumphant, hearing only a vague buzz of admiration. And now the band in the ball-room struck up the march from *La Princesse de Trébizonde*, and a second orchestra hidden in the garden repeated the strain. It was a signal for supper, and for unmasking. Helène and her ambassador led the way, and the throng followed; a dense procession of splendid and eccentric costumes, jingling bells, waving plumes, clashing armour, demons, houris, Turks, crusaders.

Lady Constance Danetree, embarrassed by the number of her admirers, all entreating the honour of her hand, paused in the midst of a little circle, undecided which mask she should favour. Abbé, Pierrot, Red Indian, Mandarin, Toreador, they all pressed round her, each hoping to be chosen, when the circle was suddenly broken by a man, taller than the tallest of them by nearly half a head, a man with the red cap of Liberty on his dark short-cut hair, and his stalwart figure clad in the carmagnole jacket of '93, a costume that had a strange and almost sinister air amidst the satin and velvet, the gold and spangles, the plumes and flowers of that glittering crowd.

'If Madame will honour me——' murmured the mask, offering his arm.

Lady Constance accepted it instantly, and

passed into the moonlit garden on the Republican's arm, leaving her circle of admirers *plantés là*.

‘What a hideous figure,’ said one

‘The ghost of revolution and bloodshed,’ said another. ‘The police ought not to allow such a costume. It is much too suggestive for the temper of the age.’

‘I should not be surprised if the gentleman himself came from the Rue de Jerusalem. The policy of the Empire has not been to make us forget ’93, but to remind us what a horrible era it was, and how lucky we are to escape a repetition of its terrors.’

The carmagnole, the red cap, the dark hair, the firm chin under the velvet mask, the tall figure and stately shoulders, the low resonant voice—not for a moment had Constance Danetree doubted the individuality of this ghost of the fatal year of ’93.

Her heart beat fast and loud as she walked by the unknown's side, across the moonlit grass—slowly, lingeringly, prolonging to the uttermost that brief journey towards the great marquee yonder, the canvas doors of which were drawn wide apart, revealing the dazzling interior—circular tables, diminishing in diameter towards the centre, circles within circles, on the plan of the Expositi-

tion, and all the tables flashing with silver and many-coloured glass, flowers, china, and all those artistic compositions in the way of pastry and confectionery which elevate cookery to a fine art. The banquet had an air of Fairyland under the electric light. The guests in their rainbow colours and tinsel and gems were crowding round the tables, filling in the circles.

‘I do not believe there will be room for us in there,’ said Lady Constance.

‘Do you think not?’ said the Carmagnole eagerly. ‘Would you rather sit here in the moon-light, and let me bring you some supper, or would it be too cold?’

‘Cold! the atmosphere is positive enjoyment after that tropical ball-room. If you do not mind the trouble I had much rather sit here.’

There were groups of rustic chairs and little Japanese tables scattered about in the cool verdant garden, and already some of these had been pounced upon by those couples who would always rather sup in a quiet corner *à-tête*, were it never so cramped or inconvenient.

The Carmagnole selected the pleasantest spot, a rustic bench sheltered from the night wind by a group of magnolias, masses of dark, shining verdure, with white goblet-shaped blossoms.

Here Lady Constance seated herself, while the Carmagnole went in quest of supper. He had not far to go, the attendance was perfect, and he had a servant at his command in a few minutes, arranging the little rustic table, bringing delicate dishes, and iced champagne in a great glass pitcher.

From the marquise came a Babel of voices. Masks had been just this moment removed. La Belle Helène, in the person of the Baroness Clavaroche, was in the central circle, welcoming her guests. Some of the greatest people in Paris were among that motley crowd. Not the Emperor, whose declining health was a reason for his absence from any private festival; nor the Empress, who had never taken kindly to Madame Clavaroche. But short of the very highest, there was no splendour of name or title wanting to the Baroness's ball.

'A brilliant scene,' said Constance, with her face turned towards the marquise.

She had not yet removed her mask, nor had the Carmagnole.

'And to-morrow there will be nothing left of it but a memory,' he answered gravely. 'Happy those for whom the memory will be linked with a face they love, not a mere garish vision of strange faces and strange finery.'

'Will it be a sweet or a bitter memory for

you, Monsieur Ishmael?’ asked Constance, smiling at him under the lace border of her mask.

‘You know me, then?’ he said, half-surprised.

‘Do you suppose that piece of black velvet across your face can hide your individuality? You would be a very commonplace person if you could disguise yourself so easily.’

‘You knew me from the first moment then?’ he said, laying aside his mask, looking at her with eyes dark with deepest feeling, as they sat opposite each other at the little supper table, half in moonlight and half in shadow.

If Madame Clavaroche’s guests in general had been as indifferent to the pleasures of the table as these two, the banquet might as well have been a stage-feast of painted fruit and empty goblets. Lady Constance had eaten half a peach, and her companion had emptied his champagne glass, and that was all. The attentive footman, seeing them preoccupied, whisked off the dainty little dishes to a table on the other side of the garden, where a columbine and a Mexican post-boy were clamorous for food.

‘Yes, I knew you from the first.’

‘And you honoured me with your arm in preference to those gentlemen round you—some of the most distinguished names in France.’

‘I see those great people every day ; and you are a stranger. There is always a pleasure in novelty.’

She spoke in her easiest manner, gracious, calm, beautiful beyond all other women in that crowded scene where beautiful women were many. But her heart was beating passionately. She felt that this man, who had so long and so persistently avoided her, would not have thrown himself in her way to-night without a motive. The motive would reveal itself presently, perhaps. In the meantime her duty as a woman was to be as calm as marble ; to ask no questions ; to reveal no warmer interest than that faint curiosity which society calls sympathy.

‘It is very good of you to remember that it is long since we met,’ said Ishmael ; and then, in a lower voice, ‘to me the time has been intolerably long, and I thought it was to be only the beginning of a hopeless forever.’

‘Indeed!’ exclaimed Lady Constance lightly ; ‘yet, as your isolation from society was a voluntary retirement, I do not see that you have any right to complain. I was informed that you were one of the few who refused the Baroness’s invitation for to-night?’

‘That is quite true.’

‘And yet you are here?’

‘And yet I am here. Within an hour or two of my coming I had no idea of being here. Lady Constance, can you imagine that the whole conditions of a man’s life may be changed in a few hours? That a man who has been a slave, fettered and tied by an obligation of the past, may suddenly find himself free—the chain snapped asunder—his own master. Such a change has happened in my life. I am my own master; free to go where I like; to see whom I like; free to love and to woo a noble and perfect woman, and to win her if I can.’

He was leaning across the narrow table, his clasped hands resting upon it, his eyes looking into her eyes. Never had the dark finely-featured face looked handsomer than under the scarlet cap of Liberty, flushed with gladness, the eyes shining in the moonlight, the lips tremulous with deepest feeling.

Constance Danetree’s eyelids drooped under that intense gaze. She tried to make light of the situation and to stave off the *dénouement*.

‘You have changed your mind then since last June, when you told Mademoiselle Jarzé that you intended never to marry?’

‘Yes; for in those days I fancied myself bound

by an old tie. And now I know that tie has long been broken, and I am free—have been free for years past, but did not know of my liberty.’

‘You are talking enigmas,’ said Constance.

‘Shall I speak more plainly?’ he asked, drawing still nearer to her, lowering his voice, lest the very leaves of the magnolia, whispering gently to themselves all the while, should have ears to hear him, ‘in plainest, simplest, truest words, as befits a plain man? I loved you from the first, Constance—from the first sweet hour when we met, amidst the frivolous surroundings of a Parisian salon. From that hour I was your slave—your worshipper. I had found my ideal, the realisation of an old, old dream; the one woman in this world whom I could reverence and adore. I had found her, and my heart went to her as the tide goes to the shore, impelled by a force it knows not, save to know that it is irresistible. I had found her—yes, but too late! I was bound, or believed myself bound by that old tie. And yet I went on meeting you—went on worshipping you—although these lips were scrupulously dumb; went on treading nearer and nearer the verge of an abyss of dishonour. I might have disregarded that old bondage of which the world knew so little; might have

ignored the past. Yes, this is how Satan would have argued had I lent my ear. The day came when I felt that I must go no further; that from this fool’s paradise I must escape, at any cost to myself. And then, half hoping you would guess that I was in some wise the slave of circumstances, I told you that I meant never to marry; and in that hour I left your house, meaning never to trust myself in your presence again. I have lived the life of a hermit since that hour; and now I am a free man, Lady Constance—free to win a noble wife, if I can!’

He took her unresisting hand, and raised it to his lips. He had drawn his chair nearer to hers in the shadow of the magnolias, and the table was no longer between them.

‘Constance, will you give me no word of hope?’

‘Is the tie of which you speak really broken?’ she asked gravely. ‘Have you the right to ask for my love?’

‘The tie is broken—by death.’

‘And there is nothing in your past life—no dishonour, no taint—which can lessen your worth in the eyes of such a woman as I

‘There is no taint—no dishonour. Commercially, all Paris can tell you what I am.

Socially, I will answer for myself. I have done no wrong!’

‘And you really love me?’

‘As women are rarely loved.’

‘I am very glad,’ she murmured softly, as he bent to listen for his fate. ‘I am glad you love me, Ishmael, for my heart went out to you with just the same irresistible impulse that night we first met. I knew, then, that it was fate. Thank God it is a happy fate, and that you give me love for love.’

CHAPTER VIII.

‘LET HIM DRINK AND FORGET HIS POVERTY.’

HALF-AN-HOUR later, and the festival was beginning to wane. Above the many coloured lights of the garden—rose-coloured lights, azure, and amber, and sapphire, and emerald, a fairy illumination—the moon was sloping westward, while the clear cold eastern sky grew clearer, colder, brighter, with an almost ghastly brightness, ghastly in its effect upon some of those unmasked faces, talking, laughing, drinking in the great circular marquee, still thronged with revellers, some of whom had been eating and drinking, and talking and flirting for an hour and more, while others had gone away and come back again, and while some had only just torn themselves away from the ball-room to come in at the fag-end of the feast. The more sober among the revellers were going home, scared by that opal light in the east. Faded beauties had resumed their masks. Mystification was rife;

some among the revellers all the more easily puzzled, perhaps, after their enjoyment of the Clavaroché champagne, which was of the best brand ever landed on the quays of Bercy yonder, where, before the aristocratic night was over, the docks would be astir with the beginning of the working day.

In the ball-room the waltzers were revolving to a strange wild music, a Cossack melody, dissonant, almost diabolical in its shrill minor, with a strange staccato accompaniment of violoncellos and double-basses, as of a dance of witches round a caldron. The flame of the candles, the flash of crystals, the interwoven rose-garlands made a cloud of rosy light above the dancers, the mirrors on the wall reflected and multiplied the motley throng, until it seemed an endless carnival, stretching into infinite distances.

The clocks of Paris were striking three when Ishmael re-entered the ball-room with Lady Constance on his arm, on the way to her carriage. For more than an hour they had sat talking in the shadow of the magnolias, while the light feet of pleasure passed and repassed upon the velvet lawn. He had told her his real name, and the story of his boyhood at Pen Hoël, his stepmother's jealousy, his father's indifference.

He had not even shrunk from the terrible revelation of his mother's guilty flight—but this he had touched on with but fewest words. The details of disgrace were untold; it was only in extenuation of his father's unkindness that he confessed his mother's dishonour.

But of his marriage, and of Pâquerette's sin he said nothing. It was enough, in his own mind, that he had spoken of a tie, now severed. Constance would draw her own inferences. He could not bring himself to enter upon the miserable story of his wedded life.

And now they were going to part for a few hours; with the sweet certainty of meeting daily, of being together in a privileged companionship day by day, until the hour of those espousals which should blend two lives into one. Each felt that in the other lived the one friend and companion who could make existence perfect. There was a sympathy, a sense of trustfulness and security rarely felt even between true lovers. Two minds that had ripened slowly in the double school of thought and experience, two hearts tried and tested, bound themselves in a solemn and sacred union—and in neither was there the shadow of wavering. Each knew that this union of heart and mind meant true and lifelong love.

As they crossed the ball-room they were met by Amélie, with her three cornered hat stuck jauntily on one side, and her eyes sparkling with mischief.

‘Such fun!’ she exclaimed to Lady Constance; ‘the two poets are here. The little Vicomte, dressed as Ronsard—such a pretty costume—only he has to explain it to everybody, and even then nine out of ten have not the least idea who Ronsard was: people are so ignorant,’ added the columbine contemptuously.

‘Yes, people are ignorant,’ said Kératry, laughing at her. ‘I don’t think you knew much about Ronsard till I told you half an hour ago. Yes, Lady Constance, they are both here. The poor devil who scrawls in a garret, and the dainty little man who publishes his carmine-sedition with Firmin-Didot; the *petit crevé* and the *teinturier*; and I’m afraid after the manner in which I saw the *teinturier* disposing of the Clavaroche cognac at the buffet just now, there may be an explosion of some kind before he leaves the ball.’

‘How did he get here?’ asked Constance, who had been told all about that literary interview in the Quartier Latin.

‘I can guess how it all came about,’ exclaimed

Amélie, who was always eager to give information. ‘Hortense has been plaguing the poor little Vicomte to write some verses about this ball, descriptive, satirical, personal, the sort of thing to set half Paris by the ears; and knowing his own incapacity, the little wretch has extorted a card from Madame Clavaroche, and has brought his friend of the Quartier Latin—the author of *Mes Nuits Blanches*.’

‘*Mes Nuits Blanches*,’ repeated Ishmael. ‘What do you know of the man who wrote that book, Mademoiselle?’

‘Ah, Monsieur Ishmael,’ cried Amélie; ‘is that you? How can you venture to wear the cap of liberty in a house which is Imperialist to the last degree? What do I know of the author of *Mes Nuits Blanches*? Very little; but he and Monsieur de Kératry are like brothers.’

‘You know Hector de Valnois?’ said Ishmael; ‘and he is here to-night!’

‘A man who wrote a book of verses called *Mes Nuits Blanches* is here to-night, dressed as François Villon, and I am afraid not in a condition to do credit to the Muses,’ replied de Kératry; ‘but as the father of our lyric poets was an arrant Bohemian and blackguard, that hardly matters. Were Villon here in the flesh

he would no doubt be as drunk as his representative. The man I mean calls himself Monsieur Nimporte, and lives in a little street at the back of the Luxembourg. Do you know his real name and his history?’

‘I knew something about him many years ago,’ answered Ishmael, as he passed on to the vestibule with Constance on his arm.

The court-yard was full of carriages, and the grave old street beyond was illuminated by the long rows of carriage lamps, garish in the pearly light of morning. Lady Constance and her companion had to wait some time for her brougham to be brought up to the door. They stood side by side under the *marquise*, amidst the orange trees and rose bushes which decorated the double flight of steps and the wide, stately doorway—stood and talked to each other, happy in the new sweet sense of union. Yet no longer on Ishmael’s part was the gladness without alloy. He was thinking of his false friend, the traitor, the seducer, the destroyer. He was waiting with feverish eagerness for the moment that was to bring them face to face at last, after long years, by accident, in a crowded ball-room. What matter where they met, so that they stood sword in hand, foot to foot, at last? As he parted

with Constance at the door of her brougham, and as he bent once more to kiss the gloved hand, there was a gloomy vision before his eyes. Ere the world were a day older this new delicious dream of life might end for him suddenly, amidst the thickening shadows of a bloody death.

He watched the carriage roll away in the circular sweep of the court yard, through the pillared gateway, and then he went back to the ball-room and to the garden beyond, to look for his enemy, the bitter foe whose face he had never seen since they parted in friendship, hand clasping hand, smiling lips uttering fair words. How diligently he had sought for this man in the years that were past and gone, using all known means of search, employing those skilled in hunting down their fellow men, and all his inquiries had been in vain. All his hired agents had failed. And now, upon this night above all other nights, this magical, ineffable hour in man's life, in the first hour of triumphant love, he was told that the traitor was under the same roof that sheltered him, the injured husband.

He thought of Pâquerette in the days of her innocence, unspoiled by the knowledge of evil. He thought of their child, lying in her little grave in the field of rest. He thought of Pâquerette's

death, the ghastly story which he had heard a few hours ago—that lonely death on a rotten ship, far out in the lonely Pacific. And was he to spare this man, when they two should stand face to face?

It was in the garden—chosen resort of the revellers and the drinkers—the people who eat half-a-dozen suppers in an evening, the men who would rather sit in corners and smoke and drink absinthe or kirsch than waltz to the music of the first band in Paris, under a shower of fading rose-leaves. It was among the fast and the furious that Ishmael looked for his foe.

The garden was crowded with maskers, and had a look as of a witch's Sabbath in the cold, clear dawn; a light which gave a ghastly look to common things, and made the entrance to the great striped marquee, with its flare of light and clamour of voices, and glare of gewgaw decoration, seem like the entrance to Tophet. Ishmael walked slowly in and out among the groups of revellers, half in the light of Chinese lanterns, lurid, multi-coloured, half in the steel-blue morning. He walked in and out by winding pathways, amidst great masses of evergreens, so arranged as to give an air of space and grandeur to the town garden, till he came to a

group around a fountain—a wide marble basin, with a marble Triton spouting water high up into the morning air.

A man was sitting on the broad margin of the basin, spouting verse—a man in a shabby mediæval costume, rusty velvet doublet, black trunk hose, pointed shoes, a broken rope hanging loose round his neck, suggestive of that hangman’s noose which Maitre Villon so narrowly escaped. A thin, wasted figure—a pale face, with iron-grey hair flowing in the morning breeze; a sickly pallor that gave a spectral air to the light blue eyes, just now illuminated with the fever of strong drink.

‘Bravo, Maitre François,’ cried the little audience, when the poet paused.

Ishmael stood outside the circle, looking at the pale, wan face, at the tremulous hands with which the poet took bottle and glass from one of his audience, and poured out a bumper of champagne.

‘Do you know, gentlemen, that Widow Cliquot and I have been strangers for years,’ he said, in his drunken voice, ‘*à ta santé, ma belle veuve*, thou art the poet’s only nepenthe.’

He drank a long draught, and then flung his glass into the fountain, shattering it into splinters

that flew like a shower of diamonds across the sparkling waters.

‘A Jewish wedding,’ he cried, ‘symbol of eternal union—the marriage of the poet and the queen of vineyards, *la belle Cliquot*.’

And then he burst again into verse, maundering verse, a *pot-pourri* of Villon, Ronsard, Voiture; the lees and rincings of a memory that had once been richly stored. His limbs had the spasmodic trembling of the absinthe-drinker. Those pale eyes of his had the look that forebodes a day when the brain behind them will be a blank.

Ishmael pushed through the crowd, and gripped the troubadour by the shoulder.

‘Hector de Valnois!’ he said, in a loud voice, ‘you were once a man, and in those days you were a consummate scoundrel, the seducer of the innocent and simple, the betrayer of your friend. In those days—thirteen years ago—I wrote you a letter. I have been waiting for the answer ever since. I am waiting still. In that letter I threatened to strike you in the open street if we two met before I was sure of my revenge. I would strike you to-night, here—spurn you like a dog, disgrace you before your fellow-men—if you were in your right senses. But I would almost as soon strike a woman as a drunken driveller like you. For to-night you

are safe ; but unless you are a coward lower than common cowards, you will send me an answer to my letter to-morrow morning. You know my name. I live in the Place Royale.’

‘Bravo, Monsieur Carmagnole, *à la lanterne* with your foe!’ cried the chorus round the poet.

Ishmael had held that wasted figure in a firm grip as he spoke, his fingers clutching the collar of the doublet. He loosed his hold suddenly, turned on his heel and walked away, the crowd parting before him.

The poet broke into a peal of shrill laughter, chuckled and crowed, rolled over in very exuberance of hysterical mirth, and tumbled backwards into the fountain, amidst a chorus of laughter from the crowd.

‘*C’est épatant,*’ said one.

‘*On se tord,*’ cried another ; while a good Samaritan, dressed like the old provençal Bluebeard, with ferocious azure moustachios, pulled the poet out of the marble basin.

He looked round at them wildly, shivering in every limb.

‘Ishmael!’ he muttered, ‘Ishmael! The man whose life I saved on the fourth of December. So much for gratitude! I’ll go home. My coach, gentlemen, my coach, as Ophelia says in Shakespeare’s play. Tieck and Schlegel is the best translation ; not de Vigny, not even Charles Hugo.

There is no good French Hamlet. My coach, gentlemen. But where is my friend, the little poet—Baudelaire in miniature—Musset *pour rire*—Ronsard, Voiture, the little Vicomte de Pontchartrain?’

His voice rose shrill above the crowd, as he crossed the lawn towards the open windows of the great rose-garlanded *salon*, where the dance was dying away slowly, softly, in its last languid circles, to the waltz in Gounod’s ‘Faust.’ Two of those last dancers, Ronsard and a Grecian Sibyl, heard that drunken call from the threshold. To one it was a sound full of alarm.

‘Pardon me,’ said the Vicomte, letting fall his partner’s hand, and leaving the white-robed sibyl alone in the sea of dancers, deserted, desolate as Ariadne at Naxos. ‘I must go to my friend.’

And then, having darted across the room to the open window at which Valnois stood shivering in his wet black raiment, ashy pale, the very ghost of pleasure and revelry, Pontchartrain caught him roughly by the arm, and exclaimed—

‘In Heaven’s name, come away! What do you mean by making a spectacle of yourself?’

‘Only remembering the days that are gone. Will you take me to my den in your carriage, or shall I go straight to Sainte-Anne? I am fitter

for the hospital than anywhere else—except my grave.’

They went out together. It was a hurried exit, which gave no opportunity for any adieu to Hortense. She had gone back to her mother, who was sitting on a divan in the vestibule among a little cluster of chaperons, powdered *à la Pompadour*, gorgeous in brocade and diamonds, or with high curling heads *à la Maintenon*, yawning behind their fans, desperately weary. For the middle aged, the end of such mirth is heaviness.

Madame Jarzé sent some one in quest of the Columbine, who was one of the last dancers in this last waltz, but who answered the maternal summons reluctantly.

‘It is the last ball of the season, mamma,’ she said discontentedly; ‘you need not hurry us away.’

‘Hurry!’ echoed Hortense, chagrined at Apollo’s desertion, ‘why, we have made ourselves a spectacle by stopping after all the best people have gone. Even Madame Clavaroche has disappeared, and I believe the Baron went to bed ages ago.’

‘Poor Baron, how pleasant it must have been to him to see people laughing at his wife,’ said Kératry.

‘That is the great advantage of a masked ball,

replied Amélie, 'one can laugh at one's best friends with every appearance of innocence. When we come to the Baroness's afternoon *causerie* next week we shall all be serious, and we shall tell her that she looked lovely as *la belle Hélène*.'

CHAPTER IX.

' DARKNESS FOR LIGHT, AND LIGHT FOR DARKNESS.'

ISHMAEL walked home in the calm morning air, through the silent sleeping city, where the only signs of life were in the region of the great central markets, on the quays, and on the bridges, across which the great waggons were slowly creeping, laden with the produce of distant fields and gardens, farms and orchards. To him this aspect of newly-awakened Paris was of all her aspects the most familiar. He loved the quiet of her streets in the clear morning light. He had walked from barrier to barrier, across all the width of the city, on many a summer morning, when his mind was full of some new scheme, and he had to fight his way through the mechanical difficulties of the work, to strike out new paths, to overcome obstacles that had barred the progress of his predecessors in the same kind of work.

To-day it was not of some great combination of stone and iron that he had to think—the thoughts

that agitated him were of his own life and his own destiny, and interwoven with that life and destiny the fate of the woman he adored. Life and love smiled upon him all in a moment, after long years of shadow and gloom. All things were well with him, save this new peril which had come upon him like a thunderclap in the midst of his delight—the peril of bloodshed, the chance of slaying his old enemy, or being slain by him. For years he had waited for this chance, had courted the opportunity, had held himself cheated, in so much as his own honour and his wife's sin remained unavenged. And now the hour of vengeance had struck—and it seemed to him an evil hour.

Could he recoil from the chance when it offered? He remembered his challenge to the seducer, the pencilled scrawl thrust into the frame of the looking-glass. Was this challenge to prove but an idle threat, because of the passage of time? There are wounds that time can heal, wrongs that time can lessen; but not such a wound or such a wrong as this.

Yet what a work had time done since the hour of Pâquerette's flight, Time, the avenger: what a wreck had time made of his enemy! That haggard ashen face with its hollow eyes and

hollow cheeks haunted him like the face of the very dead. It was like an awful caricature—a ghastly Wiertz picture—of the man he had known years ago—the poet, the jester, a little faded by a life of late hours and intellectual labour, full of joyousness and keen zest for pleasure. Now what a wreck! what a pale shadow of that brilliant youth! Ishmael’s heart sank as he pictured the meeting with that ruin of a man. Sword in hand, foot to foot with a spectre! Could they two meet on equal terms?

He stayed at home all the morning, waiting for a message from his foe. It would be late perhaps before the drunken jester of last night would be sober enough to think and to remember. But when thought and memory came, Hector de Valnois would surely answer as a gentleman should answer, even a gentleman in ruins.

The morning seemed passing weary to Ishmael, as he paced up and down his study, waiting for a message from his foe, and pining to be on his way to the villa in the Bois de Boulogne, a privileged guest. His papers lay untouched, upon his desk. He could neither work nor read. He could think of nothing but the agitating scenes of last night. In one moment his thoughts were of Constance and a blissful future; in the next he

was haunted by the vision of Pâquerette's pale face, the ship in mid-ocean, the lonely death.

At last the expected messenger came, in the person of Armand de Kératry, with whom Ishmael was tolerably intimate, from frequent meetings at the Jarzés and at other haunts of idle youth.

‘I have spent the last two hours with your old friend—and your old foe, Monsieur,’ he said; ‘and I am charged by him to offer you satisfaction for all past wrongs. He will meet you when you like, where you like, will give you the choice of weapons. He acknowledges some deep wrong done you in the past—the nature of which he has not communicated to me. I can only say that the wrong must be indeed foul and unpardonable if it can justify your thirst for revenge in your own mind and in the sight of your fellow-man—to say nothing of the eye of Heaven, which I suppose we may dismiss as an idle superstition.’

‘It is no superstition in my mind, Monsieur de Kératry,’ answered Ishmael. ‘The wrong done to me by Hector de Valnois was the deadliest wrong one man can do another—a wrong that justifies me in demanding that man’s life, although he once saved mine. There are some injuries that can only be washed out with blood. I have waited for years for this atonement, and atonement is doubly due

now—due to the dead, to the victim of that villain’s treachery. Why should I hold my hand to-day?’

‘Because to meet that man with sword or pistol in hand would be nothing less than murder. Do you think that wreck of manhood, that mere shadow of a man, can meet you upon equal terms? Do you think that shaking hand, made tremulous by the slow poison of absinthe, can have the faintest chance with sword or pistol against your nerves of steel and muscles of iron? Can the dead stand up against the living? You in the pride of undamaged manhood, he the exhausted victim of an evil life, of poverty, disappointment, despair. Would you call upon a ghost to atone for the wrongs done by the living man? I tell you, Hector de Valnois is no better than a ghost. If you meet him, the duel will be suicide on his part, on yours murder.’

‘Did he tell you to appeal to my compassion?’

‘No; a thousand times no. The spirit of manhood is not extinct, even after years of poverty, absinthe, degradation. He told me to come to you and arrange a speedy meeting—this afternoon if you like, an hour before sunset, in a quiet hollow beyond Vincennes. He described the spot to me—not too remote, yet secluded and safe. No, he has no wish to avoid a meeting; he has

an ardent desire to facilitate one: the feverish haste of a man to throw away a life that has long seemed worthless. But there is such a thing as compunction even on the part of the deadliest foe; and I tell you that to meet this man would be murder, a crime that would weigh heavy on your conscience, a sin that would haunt you to your dying day. The man is nothing to me, remember—a chance acquaintance who has been useful to me in literature, and whom I have paid for his work. I plead to you as man to man, more in your own interest than in his.'

'My own interest, my own inclination alike prompt me to hear you,' answered Ishmael gravely. 'If I cannot meet him on equal terms, I cannot meet him at all. After what I saw last night—well, yes; you are right. How could that shaking hand hold a sword against mine, which has grappled with a young lion in Algeria. You are right. I must not meet him, although I cannot forgive him. If I alone had been the sufferer, pardon might be possible; but there is one dead—dead broken-hearted—whom he wronged worse than he wronged me. Her injuries can never be purged, except by the fire that burns away all sin. Tell Hector de Valnois that I decline his offer of satisfaction. It comes too late. Neither his blood nor mine can bring

back the dead, or undo the past. Tell him for the life he saved on the fourth of December I give him his own : and that so far, life for life, we are quits. Let him forget that he and I ever knew each other. Let him forget his victim : if he can.’

And, then, after a moment or so of hesitation, he added hurriedly, taking some notes from his desk, and handing them to Armand :

‘You tell me he is in straitened circumstances. I shall be grateful to you if you will relieve him—as though from your own purse. He gave me his bed once, and dressed my wounds. I thought him a good Samaritan in those days.’

Armand de Kératry took the little packet of bank-notes without a word.

‘I expected no less from you,’ he said. ‘I know that you are a brave man as well as a good man ; and no brave man would meet a foe upon unequal terms.’

They shook hands, and parted ; and Ishmael felt as if a terrible burden was lifted off his mind by the result of this interview. To slay or to be slain : neither a pleasant contingency for a man who has just won the crowning grace of a prosperous career—the love of the woman he adores. It was two o’clock in the afternoon. He had not taken any rest since the previous

day. How long ago it seemed now! What a deep ravine had yawned asunder in the level monotony of daily life, dividing yesterday from to-day! He threw himself into an easy-chair, and slept for an hour or more from sheer exhaustion; then dressed, and drove to the villa in the Bois—that luxurious home whose threshold he had not crossed since the June afternoon when he avowed his intention never to marry. And now he entered the hall with a firm, free step, as the affianced of the mistress of the house.

The dogs came out and fawned upon him in friendly welcome before the servant could announce him. ‘Did *she* send them?’ he wondered. He was a man to whom animals came as by an instinct, sure in advance of his good will. Lion, the colley, put his nose into the visitor’s hand, and went into the *salon* with him; while Bijou walked composedly by his side, looking up at him with serious black eyes, as if she had been expecting him for ages. And in the sunny window, with a little world of greensward, fountain, and roses outside, Constance was waiting for him with sweetest welcome.

And now began for Ishmael the halcyon days of his life—a time of sweet communion with the chosen among all womankind; of growing intimacy

with a nobler nature than it had been his lot to know until now. It was the absolute fulfilment of his youthful dream—a loftier soul than his own, stooping from higher spheres to bear him company on earth. What bliss to be understood as he had never been understood before—to find perfect sympathy, perfect comprehension—to have his ambition no longer regarded as the commonplace contractor’s greed of gain, but understood from a loftier standpoint, as the engineer’s glory in great achievements, in difficulties vanquished, rough ways made smooth.

They had so much to talk about in the present and the future, that it is scarcely strange if he told her but little of the past—since, to have gone back upon the story of those early days would have been to go too near the darkest passages of his life. He told her of his wild free life in Brittany ; of his scanty stock of learning acquired from good Father Bressant ; of the circumstances that had driven him from his home, touching but lightly on his father’s injustice, his step-mother’s ill-will ; of his marriage he said nothing, beyond that first confession that the breaking of an old tie had left him free. Constance had drawn her own inferences, and had made up her mind that some sad story was involved in this old tie ; and for

her part she so gloried and rejoiced in his love, she was so proud of having won for her lover a man of a different stamp from all the other men she had ever encountered—the ideal man, in a word, the worker, the victor, the man who had faced difficulties and overcame them, and whose wealth of knowledge in all things was only less than his modest appreciation of his own acquirements; she was so proud of her lover that it never entered into her mind to be curious about the details of his life. She was delighted to listen when she could win him to talk of himself, but she never questioned him. Her faith in him was boundless.

And so the summer days wore on, and the season waned, and all the gorgeous-winged butterflies of Parisian society had flown southward to bluer skies, to game and dance and flirt and gossip and dress and paint beside the tideless Mediterranean, only transferring Parisian habits, Parisian extravagances, Parisian luxurious living to the towns scattered along the Riviéra. The Parisian was gone out of Paris, and only the trampling of tourists, American, English, Belgian, German, populated the boulevards and kept up the clink of glasses, the crowd of idlers, at the little tables on the pavement, in the sultry heat of July afternoons.

Constance and her lover cared nothing for the departure of these children of fashion and folly. They only waited till certain legal preliminaries should be arranged, settlements drawn, communications made with the lady's kindred, and so on. Lord Kilrush wrote to express his gratification at his daughter's engagement to so worthy a suitor as Monsieur Ishmael, whose reputation was European, and at the same time conveyed his regret at being under a medical regime, which forbade his leaving Hombourg, even for a few days, and thus prevented his presence at the marriage ceremony.

CHAPTER X.

THOU DOST DWELL AMONG SCORPIONS.

IT was the eve of Ishmael's wedding-day, the eve of a sultry day at the beginning of August.

The heat had been oppressive even amidst the murmuring boughs of the Champs Élysées and that fair wood beyond; and with evening the air grew heavier, as with the presage of a thunder-storm; whereupon all the inhabitants of western Paris who knew how to live drifted towards the wood and the cascade, to eat ices and smoke cigarettes betwixt starshine and lamplight, to flirt or gossip to a *pianissimo* accompaniment of rushing waters and waving leaves.

The train of carriages, with their coloured lamps, looked like an army of glowworms creeping along the leafy avenues under the shades of night. Not a Jehu in all Paris but had his fare on this August evening. The heat of those dazzling cafés on the boulevards was insupportable; theatres were suggestive of the Black Hole at Calcutta; and

even the stranger, to whom the Parisian boulevards are a wonder and a delight, pined for fresher air and an escape from the glare and the din.

But if the summer night was sultry and stifling on the boulevards and in the Palais Royal, what was it in the slums and low neighbourhoods which hang on the skirts of Paris like a foul fringe upon an imperial robe? There were slums and loathsome spots still left even in the heart of this splendid Haussmannised city; and if there were ashes and blackness within the core of the golden apple, how much the more might such evil things be looked for outside, remote from the dwellings of those who wear purple and fine linen.

Far from the roll of carriage wheels, the tramp of thoroughbred horses, the glitter of palaces, and bloom of palace gardens, is a sordid external zone of filth and poverty, and famine and fever, a world that knew not Imperial Caesar, save as a name; a name which might mean anything, but which certainly did *not* mean food and clothing and decent shelter.

Among these regions of outermost darkness in the far north of Paris, near Clichy—a region as little known to the ordinary Parisian visitor as the North Pole itself—there is a small settlement, given over for the most to the rag-picking confraternity, and known as the Cité du Soleil.

It is not to the beauty of its situation, nor to the dazzle of gilded domes and pinnacles that this City of the Sun owes its name, nor has it been so christened in irony. The simple reason that the place has been so called is that the waste ground about those wretched hovels has been planted, time out of mind, with sunflowers, which thrive amidst the surrounding squalor, and encircle the dwellings of the outcast with an aureole.

Rich in all loathsome odours, black with the grime of ages, this City of the Sun surpasses all the other settlements of the surrounding plain in squalor and hideousness. Where all are vile this ranks as vilest. The narrow alleys which separate the huts where the rag-pickers sleep on their rags, are mere muddy channels, in which children, dogs, and swine crawl and grovel, fighting with each other for the bones, the stale cabbage-stumps, the putrid lobster-shells, which fall from the rag-pickers' baskets. The fronts of the rotten old hovels are decorated with skeletons of cats, skulls of dogs, foxes' brushes. The sickening stench of the place overpowers the passer-by at ten yards distance.

The road near which lies this colony of dirt and poverty is called the Route de la Révolte. The very name is sinister, but the actuality is

even more terrible :—a long dreary road which goes from Neuilly to St. Denis, muddy in winter, dusty in summer, a road which pierces a world given over to squalor and disrepute — nay, too often made notorious by some dark history of crime—a region of waste places and dilapidated buildings, the comfortless shelter of mountebanks and beggars, scavengers, Israelitish merchants in broken glass and rabbit skins, chair-menders—a region in whose pestiferous alleys, and above whose stagnant gutters hang the germs of typhoid and typhus, the seeds of phthisis, the taint of cholera-morbus. Only the acclimatised can exist in that polluted atmosphere.

On this August night not a breath of air stirred in the City of the Sun, where the sunflowers were just unfolding their golden rays. A hot and heavy mist brooded over the dilapidated roofs and rickety chimneys ; over the pigs, lazier than their wont, as they sprawled in the sultry eventide ; the children ; the gaunt, lean curs, lowest specimens of the dog family, and seemingly a peculiar breed of mongrel, engendered of poverty and dirt.

It was between eight and nine o'clock. The mountebanks and beggars, the lame, the halt, and the blind, were crawling home, shuffling off their various infirmities as they came along.

The sickly children, ill enough in all conscience with the chronic disease of poverty, yet simulating other maladies; the widows who never had husbands; the orphans whose fathers are waiting at home to beat them; the men with organs, with monkeys, and with performing dogs; these, jocund some of them, weary all, are creeping back to their nests, while the rag-pickers are going out. In an hour the City of the Sun will be almost deserted by the profession by which it is particularly affected. But there are some few dwellers in those evil-smelling dens who are not of the brotherhood of the basket and lantern, and these are the more dangerous inhabitants of the place. From these the City of the Sun derives its second name of the Little Mazas, so called because its occupants have either just come from prison or are just going there.

In one of the hovels, a den in a dark corner, furthest from the highway, a woman lay on a wretched pallet, gazing at the waning light, drawing her breath heavily, as if each respiration were a labour and a pain. An old crone, bent, withered, wrinkled, crouched beside the hearth, upon which an iron pot simmered and bubbled above a handful of embers. The entire

furniture of the room consisted of the pallet-bed, two broken chairs, an old egg box which did duty for a table, and a heap of rags in a corner, which served the crone for a bed.

The woman had been languishing in that wretched den for weeks, wasting in the deadly grip of pulmonary disease. There had been days on which she rallied and was able to crawl about in the sunshine, seized now and again with that terrible cough of hers, obliged to hold on to some dilapidated railing or door post, while she was shaken by the convulsive violence of a coughing fit which almost meant suffocation. There had been days on which she had crept into Paris, and had crawled as far as the boulevard Montmârtre, and looked with her wan ghost-face at the crowd and the movement of the city; only to go back to her hovel, exhausted by the exertion, and to all appearance having discounted the brief remnant of her days by that imprudent waste of power.

The crone yonder had urged this dying grand-child of hers to apply for free quarters at the hospital. There she would be tended and fed and doctored; there she could have all she needed. Here she could have very little; a cup of wretched soup made of bones from the basket;

a crust of dry bread from the same foul source. Money the crone had none, she protested; in actual truth every farthing she earned was spent for drink. She had been a drunkard seventeen years ago in the rue Sombreuil, when that wasted form upon the pallet was young and fair. She was a drunkard now—a patron of the local *assommoir*, a consumer of that vile brandy whose fiery flavour has won for it the name of ‘vitriol’ or *casse-poitrine*, in the slang of the unlucky wretches who drink it.

Yes, that pallid, haggard face was the face of Pâquerette. Those faded eyes gazing wearily at the setting sun, seen through the open door—a fiery shield, at the end of a long vista of huts and pigstyes, sheds and broken railings—those pale, sad eyes were the eyes that were once as lovely as the eyes of the Greuze in the Louvre; innocent, childlike eyes, looking up at Ishmael with the tender trustfulness of a child. They had seen the world since those days, poor faded eyes! They had looked on strange people and strange cities; they had confronted the glare of the footlights, the bronzed faces of men of many nations, the fumes of drink and tobacco. Yes, she had seen the world, poor little Pâquerette; she had led a life of change and adventure with

her Bohemian lover. She had been rich and poor, happy and miserable. She had feasted and she had starved, had alternated between fine clothes and rags, had shared the ups and downs of a clever unscrupulous man who lived by his wits: and finally there had come an end. Hector de Valnois' fortunes had taken the downward slope. His health had declined with the decline of his prosperity. He became irritable, hypochondriac, a martyr to neuralgia, a man most difficult to live with.

In Valparaiso, where Pâquerette was earning money as a singer at a French café-concert, he was seized with nostalgia, sickened for Paris, felt that in no other place could his strength revive, nowhere else could the freshness and vigour of his brain be restored. He had lost the power to write prose or poetry. It was this diabolical country which burnt up his brain with its feverish atmosphere; its hot winds and seething mists. Nor could he write in exile. He wanted contact with his fellow-men. This is why his faculty as poet, as journalist, as novelist, playwright, critic, had been declining for the last ten years. He made up his mind one wakeful night—tormented by heat and mosquitos—that he would sail for France by the next vessel that left the port.

‘You will meet Ishmael, and he will kill you,’ gasped Pâquerette, white with fear at the very thought of her husband’s vengeance. ‘He swore that he would kill you; I heard him.’

‘That was ten years ago. Do you suppose he has not got over the loss of you by this time?’ asked Hector, with a sneer.

It was in vain that Pâquerette pleaded. The next French steamer took them back to Marseilles; and from Marseilles they travelled to Paris, without an hour’s avoidable delay. They arrived in the great city almost penniless, but Hector de Valnois was past master of the mysteries of Parisian life—from the palace to the gutter. He found a cheap lodging in the labyrinth of narrow streets near the Luxembourg: and here Pâquerette and he existed for nearly three years, she accepted as his wife by the few who crossed the threshold of his shabby home.

Here de Valnois did journeyman’s work for his old publishers, for the *Figaro*, for the *Corsaire*, working under a *nom de plume*, ashamed that the Parisian world should know the author of *Mes Nuits Blanches* had sunk to the scribbler of stray paragraphs and the puffer of wealthy advertisers. He kept aloof from all who had known him in his butterfly stage, his brief day

of splendour and success. He rarely rose till noon, rarely went out of doors till nightfall. He dined at some popular restaurant in the student's quarter, after everyone else's dinner was over. He was always later than other people. He was the last to leave the billiard room or the café; the last to send in his copy to the newspaper from which he drew the pittance upon which he lived.

Pâquerette earned no money in Paris. She did not even try to get an engagement at theatre or concert. First she had a morbid dread of being seen by her husband; secondly her voice began to fail her soon after her return to Paris. She had caught a severe cold on the steamer on board which she and Hector travelled as second-class passengers. Her health declined; her beauty faded; the bird-like soprano voice grew thin and feeble. The Pâquerette of the past was dead. The white Easter daisy had faded for ever.

Poverty is but a sour soil for the fragile floweret called love. These two had been faithful to each other through changing fortunes. They had been brave and hopeful, so long as in the evil hour there was a chance of change for the better. But they had sunk now into the

level monotony of hopeless poverty ; and that condition of things is trying to the temper, especially to a man's temper. One day Hector disgraced his manhood eternally by telling his faithful companion that she was a burden to him, a clog, an incubus ; that his fatal passion for her had blighted his prospects, ruined his life ; that but for her he would have been the successor of Alfred de Musset, a favourite guest at Fontainebleau and Compiègne, a member of the Academy, a rich man. It was a burst of spleen, of wounded pride ; the bitter sense of failure ; the proud man's rage at the success of his inferiors. It was a sudden gust of all evil feelings concentrated in one angry speech. It was the passion of a moment, the savage outburst of a fallen angel stung by gad-flies. It had no real significance ; but it broke Pâquerette's heart.

She answered not a word. She stood before him, white as death, and as motionless. She stood and watched him, as he flung on his hat and dashed out of the room. It was on the edge of night, and he was going to his favourite haunt in the Place de la Sorbonne, Le Picrate, famous for its absinthe. When he was gone she went to her bedroom, and put a few things together in an old shawl,

which she pinned into a little package, with tremulous hands. Then she put on her rusty little black-lace bonnet, tied her black veil tightly across her hollow cheeks, and went out into the street, leaving the key with the portress as she went by.

‘ You can tell Monsieur I am not coming back any more,’ she said.

The woman stared at her, not taking in the full meaning of her words. She spoke too quietly to mean anything tragic.

She meant just what she said: never to go back to him any more. She was leaving him for ever—the man for whom she had sacrificed husband, home, good name, and all the best and brightest years of her life. She was running away; just as she had run away from the rue Sombreuil fifteen years ago, to escape her grandmother’s ill-treatment. Poor little Pâquerette! her only notion of self-defence was to run away.

Fifteen years ago she had fled from the rue Sombreuil. To-night she went back there—wind-ing like the hunted hare to her form, and nearly as hard sped as the hunted hare. In all Paris she knew of no friend to whom she could safely appeal in her dire necessity, except those first friends of hers who had looked with compassion

upon her miserable girlhood. Of Lisette Moque, that fast friend of later days, the friend who had encouraged her in her folly, she thought with a shudder, for to Lisette's fatal influence she traced her own fall. The experience that should have guided her steps in the midst of danger, the worldly knowledge which should have saved her, had only been used to her disadvantage. No. Had she been starving and shelterless in the streets of Paris, she would not now have accepted shelter and food from Madame Moque.

It was a long walk from the Luxembourg to the rue Sombreuil, for limbs that had lost much of their youthful elasticity; and there was only disappointment at the end of the journey. The old portress was in her dusky den by the doorway; the court-yard and staircase looked exactly as they had looked fifteen years ago, only so much the more squalid; so much the darker, uglier, drearier by the passage of those fifteen years.

'The Benoîts are gone,' said the hag, staring hard at Pâquerette's closely-veiled face, 'Oh, but gone for ages. The little Mam'selle, she that was *jolie à croquer*, she married a baker from Rouen seven years ago, and they went to Rouen to live soon after their marriage; and then the big Mam'selle, *la grande Lisbeth*, married an English-

man, and she and the cousin, Mam'selle Toinette, went to London.'

All this had happened ages ago.

Pâquerette leaned against the greasy door-post, trembling and faint. How much she had hoped for—succour, consolation, Christian charity—here where she found nothing. Gone to Rouen, gone to London—those old friends. To her the case seemed as hopeless as if they had gone to Siberia. How could she follow them—she who had only a few francs in her shabby little purse; she who turned cold and faint and weak at the slightest mental distress?

'Have you heard anything lately of a woman who once lived in those rooms?' she asked presently, pointing to those old casements on the ground floor, which were a little cleaner than they had been in Mère Lemoine's time, and which were ornamented with a few tufts of prim-roses and cowslips, growing in old blacking bottles; 'But of course she is dead! She must have been dead for years.'

'Mère Lemoine, do you mean?' cried the portress.

Pâquerette nodded assent.

'Mère Lemoine is not dead, Madame; Mère Lemoine is as much alive as the Emperor—more

so, perhaps; for people say that the Emperor has a malady which will kill him, and that he is beginning to fail already; while Mère Lemoine seems as if she would never die. It is a healthy occupation, that of a rag-picker, to be out all night in the cool air, when the streets are empty and the town is quiet.'

'She is living then?—and a rag-picker! Poor soul!'

'Well, it is not a pleasant trade; but they seem to thrive upon it. Mère Lemoine must be eighty years of age. She came into this yard within the last month. She knows that she can get a taste of brandy once in a way for the sake of old times. She is bent nearly double, withered, and wrinkled—*Dieu de Dieu*, how withered, how wrinkled! But she is alive, and as hale and hearty as you or I.'

She was still living, then, that old, old woman, the grandmother who had beaten her and scolded her, and driven her as a fugitive from that very house; and now the time had come when Pâquerette's last hope of a refuge was from the charity of that very grandmother. The whirligig of time had brought about its own revenges. There was nothing for her save this or the hospital. And she was not ill enough to ask

State charity. If she had been, she might have preferred the hospital.

‘Do you know where Mère Lemoine lives?’ she asked.

‘She lives in a place where a great many of the rag-pickers live.’

‘In the rue Sainte-Marguerite?’

‘No, no; ever so much further off than the rue Sainte-Marguerite. She lives up by Clichy, on the Route de la Révolte, in a place called the Cité du Soleil—a place given over to rag-pickers.’

‘The Cité du Soleil,’ repeated Pâquerette, faintly; for she was very tired after her walk; ‘I suppose I shall be able to find the place?’

‘Why not? You have a tongue in your head,’ answered the woman, carelessly; for Pâquerette did not look a person likely to pay for politeness. ‘You have to find your way to Clichy, and then any one will show you the Cité du Soleil.’

Pâquerette thanked her, and left the rue Sombreuil for ever. She walked some distance in the direction of Clichy, and then, almost ready to drop, she found there was an omnibus which would carry her for a considerable stage of the journey for a few sous. This helped her, and in the spring night between eight and nine o’clock

she arrived at the City of the Sun—just when the rag-pickers were issuing from their hovels, a little procession of old men and women, each with a lantern swinging at the end of a stick—a train of glowworms in the spring night.

Pâquerette put up her veil, and stood by the roadside to watch them go by. The stars were shining in the April sky, the night was soft and gray rather than dark. Everyone turned to look at that figure standing by the wayside, with a white wan face evidently watching for something or someone. The rag-pickers went by slowly, moving stiffly, halting in their walk like old horses after an interval of repose. Some of them mumbled and muttered as they hobbled along, as if chewing the cud of better days. Pâquerette gazed piteously at those old wrinkled faces, at the women most of all, looking for her grandmother. Almost at the tail of the dismal procession came a hag more bent and decrepit than any other example of age and misery presented by that squalid company. Her head nodded, her chin worked convulsively as she tottered along, mouthing, muttering. Her lantern shook like a light on a ship at sea, her skinny hand trembled as it clutched her staff. She, too, inquisitive even in her semi-imbecility, turned and peered

with dim bleared eyeballs at the figure by the wayside.

Something in the crone's nutcracker countenance was familiar to those sad eyes looking out of the pale face.

'Grandmother!' faltered Pâquerette, faintly.

The crone started, and then came close to her, staring at her, devouring her, with wild, haggard eyes.

'Jeanneton!' she screamed. 'It is my daughter's ghost!'

'No, grandmother; it is your daughter's daughter: broken-hearted like her mother; wretched and poor, and friendless, like her mother. You see it runs in the family.'

'Why, then, it is Pâquerette!' cried the hag, 'that shameless rag of a granddaughter; the child I reared out of charity, and who deserted me in my old age.'

She planted her staff upon the dusty ground, and stood leaning upon it, gazing at Pâquerette, while the squalid regiment of rag-pickers moved onward, and the twinkling lights melted and vanished in the gray eventide.

'I did wrong, grandmother; but you were too hard upon me. You beat me because I refused to marry a man I hated.'

‘To hate such a man! Oh, the folly of these girls!’ cried the hag: ‘a man who had saved money; a man whose wife is a lady. I have seen her. Do you hear, child? I have seen the Charabia’s wife. She was a servant at a wine-shop in the rue de la Roquette—a brazen wench. He married her a year after you ran away. Ah, but she lives well; she has a warm nest. She is one of the fattest women in the faubourg Saint-Antoine. She goes to the theatre twice a week. She wears a silk gown on Sundays. Ah, you were a fool Pâquerette—a fool. Just like your mother. All young women are fools.’

‘Yes, grandmother, I have been a fool: but not for refusing to marry the Charabia; not even for running away from you. I have been a fool, and my folly has left me without a friend, or a roof to cover me. Can you give me shelter till I can look about, and do something to earn my living?’

‘Shelter—but—yes; I have a home, a snug little home, and you shall share it. Folks shall not have to say that I refused shelter even to a runaway granddaughter. Your mother ran away, and she came back—back to the old nest. And you, you too have come back. Strange, very strange,’ muttered the old woman, prattling on

in a senile fashion, as she led the way to the City of the Sun.

The City of the Sun! In all Pâquerette's varied experience she had never beheld anything so hideous as that collection of hovels, and pig-styes and dust heaps, all grouped together haphazard, human and porcine habitations nestling side by side, dust-heaps piled against the walls, on a level with bedroom windows. The house in the rue Sombreuil was an abode of luxury, a *bourgeoise* and *cossue* habitation, as compared with these dilapidated shanties of worm-eaten wood or crumbling plaster. A pane of glass here and there in a window was the rare exception that proved the rule of broken casements stuffed with brown paper, rags, old hats, and rotten straw. The chief endeavour of the inhabitants seemed to be not to let the light in at their windows, but to keep the weather out. Thus an old boot, or a saucepan lid was deemed an appropriate substitute for a broken pane.

And the odours; the fœtid stream of animal corruption; the rank taint of rotten vegetables; the sickly, indescribable stench, which combined all imaginable foulness in one loathsome essence,—from these Pâquerette recoiled, shuddering: but the grandmother's skinny fingers gripped her shawl, and drew her on.

‘I have a snug little home at the end here, in a nice, sheltered corner,’ she muttered, chuckling and gibbering as she went along. ‘I haven’t paid any rent for six months. They are a rough lot about me, and the collector got frightened the last time he came to our end of the place, and has never ventured so far since. There are some queer fellows live next to me—Italians; very quick with their knives; and they threatened to stab that fine gentleman when he came prying about with a leather money-bag across his chest and a little bottle of ink in his waistcoat pocket. He has never been near me since.’

She led the way to the *ultima Thule* of the City of the Sun, a hut more dilapidated than any they had passed yet; for the roof was half off, and the rotting rafters were covered with an old mattrass and a piece of tarpaulin. There was not a pane of glass left in the old leaden casement; there was not an inch of unbroken plaster on the walls; and the floor was the primitive earth. In one corner there was a huge heap of rags; in another a smaller pile of broken glass and old metal; in the middle of the floor a collection of more valuable *débris*—bones, relics of stale fish, crusts, cabbage-stumps. These were intended to furnish Mère Lemoine’s larder. On

one side of the bare hearth there was an old iron pot, which formed the hag's entire *batterie de cuisine*; on the other stood a bent and battered brazen candlestick, holding a couple of inches of tallow candle, which the old woman lighted at the flame of her lantern.

Horror-stricken at the aspect of this den, Pâquerette recoiled on the very threshold. Surely it would be better to sleep under the open sky, to lie in a ditch, than to inhabit such a hole as this. But she remembered that in Paris it needs a long education in pauperism to be able to sleep out of doors, so keen are the authorities upon the amateur vagrant. She had heard Hector de Valnois describe the shifts of his Bohemian acquaintance—the *Réfractaires* of society—their life-long duel with the *sergents-de-ville*. And at this very moment her limbs were sinking under her with faintness and fatigue. Her feet would have refused to carry her a hundred yards further. She was sorely changed from the light-footed slip of a girl, who had fled like a lapwing from the Bastille to Ménilmontant fifteen years ago. Fifteen years! Ah! what a weary time, and what a dreary change those years had brought!

‘There,’ cried the hag triumphantly, pointing to the wretched pallet. ‘There is a nice, com-

fortable bed, where you can take your ease of a night while I am toiling for a living. If you want a crust, you will find plenty there,' nodding towards the heap of nameless *débris*; 'and a savoury bone into the bargain. I must be off, or I shall lose my chances on the boulevard Poissonnière: that's my beat. There are some rare bits to be picked up at the *restaurants* along there; and there would be much better pickings, only the little sisters of the poor get the best of everything, taking the bread out of our mouths. If'—here she hesitated, as before making a stupendous sacrifice—'if you want anything to drink, there's a taste of *casse-poitrine* left in the bottle there.'

'Brandy, do you mean?' faltered Pâquerette. 'Yes, I should like a little drop: I feel faint and sick.'

The old woman looked at her doubtfully, with a disappointed air, as of one who had expected her offer to be refused. She went over to the heap of rags, and groped for a bottle that she had hidden under the unsavoury pile. She brought it out with a reluctant air, and held it up against the flame of the candle.

'There's not much more than a taste,' she said: 'we'll share it.'

To be certain of fair play, she drank her own

half first, out of the bottle, which she handed afterwards to her granddaughter.

Pâquerette returned it untouched. The idea of that heap of foul rags revolted her. She could not taste anything kept in such a hiding-place.

‘A little water, please,’ she faltered.

Alas! water in that human kennel was less attainable than brandy. There was a rickety cask in front of a hovel three or four doors off which received the drippings of rain water from the rotten roofs above, and this was the only supply to which Mère Lemoine ever resorted. Although loath to delay her setting forth any further, the old woman took a cracked mug from the mantle-shelf and hobbled off to fetch some water. She came back with the mug full of a blackish fluid, which Pâquerette drank greedily, with fever-parched lips, only discovering its putrid taint after she had drunk.

She sank down upon the wretched pallet, just as she must have sunk upon the bare ground outside, if there had been no such couch. Her strength was exhausted, her course was run. Loathsome as the den was she had no power to leave it for a better shelter. Had a comfortable home been waiting for her a quarter of a mile off, she could not have crawled so far.

This was the beginning of long days and nights of pain and penance. If Pâquerette had known intervals of remorse and suffering before, those transient periods of sorrow were as light as thistle-down compared with the weight of anguish which oppressed her soul as she lay hour after hour in the solitude of her kennel—always alone; for the witch-like figure of the old grandmother squatting beside her heap of rags, sorting and separating her grimy stock-in-trade with still grimmer fingers, muttering and nodding the while over her work—such companionship as this could hardly be called society. And when the rags were sorted in the chill morning hour, the crust mumbled, the bone gnawed, the hag drained her measure of *casse-noitrine* and rolled herself in a corner among her rags to sleep through the summer day. Sorry company at best.

And then the melancholy nights, when the hag was gone forth on her filthy quest in the gutters of the great city; and when the dying woman lay broad awake, gazing at the clouds sailing past in the far-off sky, or the summer stars shining in that fair infinite of which she knew so little. She had taken away the rubbish that had choked the casement, so as to get all the air she could in her den. When the old woman grumbled at

the open window Pâquerette contrived a temporary screen with her shawl and the rush seat of an old chair, that had long parted with its legs; but all night while Mère Lemoine was away, she had the casement open to the weather, even albeit the night was stormy, and the wind and the rain beat in upon her bed. It was air she wanted most of all, air for that labouring chest, that weary heart. Ah, what long hours of agony, of retrospection, of bitter memories! How full of sadness were the visions of her head upon her bed in those silent summer nights! silent save for a gust of evil speech, the noise of distant brawlers borne by upon the wind. What heart-rending thoughts of the night have been! What keen regret for the things which were!

It was not of her seducer that she thought most in those sad night-watches—not of him for whom she had surrendered home and good name. It was upon the image of the wronged husband that her mind dwelt; it was upon all that life might have been had she honoured her marriage vow. It was of that lost destiny she thought. She knew now the worth of the man she had deserted; knew his value, by contrast with the man for whose sake she had deserted him. She knew that she had flung away the fine gold and

taken to herself the dross. She had been very faithful to that bond of dishonour. Thus far, at least, she had been superior to the herd of fallen women. She had sinned once, and for ever; she had accepted the penalty of her sin. She had never tried to lessen her burden. She had borne with her lover's fitful temper, slaved for him, obeyed him, cherished him, with sublime self-abnegation, only to be told at last that she had blighted his life!

Her downward career had been full of trouble and weariness, but she had clung to her comrade in misfortune; all the more faithful because the road they trod together was rough and thorny. And at the end of all he flung her constancy in her face, told her that she had been a clog upon his actions, the cause of all his failures. That last insult had broken her heart. And now in these long and lonely days, uncheered by friendship, unsustained by religion, amidst foulest surroundings, in pain and penury, Pâquerette's memory went back to her married life, to the peaceful, gracious home she had abandoned, and to the husband who had been all goodness and all indulgence for her, and whose only fault had been to work over-hard for the future which they two were to share together. Ah, what a happy life it

seemed, her life on that second floor at Ménil-montant, looked back upon from her den in the City of the Sun! She had not known a care in those days. Her nest had been soft and warm, her purse well filled. And now, alas! the story of the prodigal son was recalled to her, as she thought that Ishmael's dog had better fare than the mouldy crusts or the rancid broth which was offered to her dry lips by the grandmother's charity.

And for her there was no possibility of return. She could not go back like the prodigal son, and confess her sorrow for her sin. Her sin was of a kind which sets an everlasting barrier between the sinner and the offended one. God would forgive her, perhaps. Her Creator and her Judge would accept this long penance in sackcloth and ashes: but Ishmael could not pardon. For what motive had she sinned against him? For a fancy; for a dream; for the impulse of an idle mind. Looked back upon now in her misery, that sin seemed as motiveless as it had proved fatal.

Memory travelled back to even earlier days: to that joyous holiday under green leaves, that midsummer day in the woods of Marly. She had loved Ishmael then, looking up at him as to a being of superior mould, adoring him with innocent girlish worship, as pure of soul in her dingy ground-

floor den as the most high-bred damsel in the faubourg Saint-Germain, just emerged from conventual seclusion. The snowdrop in the workman's window unfolds itself from its green sheaf as fair a blossom as the tuber-rose in a duchess's conservatory. The taint and the grime come later to the open flower. Yes, Pâquerette had been pure in those days, and had given Ishmael a holy and an innocent love. And Fate had smiled upon her as it smiles on few of her class; and she had won a good and true man for her husband. And then came a life too free from care; days too easy; idleness that corrupts the soul: and for a frivolous fancy she gave her life to shame and dishonour.

She had leisure enough in which to trace the progress of her folly as she lay staring up at the sky, her only prospect, or watching the green tops of the sunflowers grow taller as the days went by, only token of the passage of time, except the racking cough and the sharp pain in her side, which grew a little worse every day. And, oh, the bitterness of those keen regrets, the dull agony of remorseful memories which travelled again and again over the same ground! Only the sinner who has lost all because of one irreparable act, knows the sharpness of such a repentance.

In those long blank days Pâquerette's fine ear

grew accustomed to every sound in the City of the Sun; unmelodious, harsh, discordant sounds for the most part, which were a pain to that delicate sense of hearing; the grunting of pigs; the shrill yells and evil language of that gutter-brood, sprawling and squabbling in the sunshine and the dirt, children only a little higher than the animals they played with and fought with; the yelping of dogs; the crowing and cackling of a ragged regiment of fowls; the grating sound of a hurdygurdy, the treble piping of a tin-whistle; the still harsher sounds of human quarrelling, which seemed always at a pitch of acrimony that touched the edge of murder.

There were two or three itinerant musicians among the dwellers in the sunflower city; and of these the best known to Pâquerette were a pair of Italian organ-grinders who inhabited the den next Mère Lemoine's dwelling. The rotten partitions were so thin that Pâquerette could hear every tone of their voices—nay, could sometimes hear their very words, though she was rarely able to understand more than a sentence here and there. This was not because they spoke Italian—for in the course of her southern wanderings Pâquerette had learned a good deal of Italian, and a little Spanish; but because they for the most part spoke in a

Neapolitan *patois*, curiously interlarded with the newest Parisian slang.

Sometimes, of a summer evening, after Mère Lemoine had gone out with her basket and her lantern, the two Italians would rest themselves after their labours on a bench in front of their den, smoking and talking in the twilight, while their macaroni was simmering on the hearth inside sending forth savoury odours of cheese and garlic. And at these times Pâquerette could hear every word they said. Unseen as they were, they were her only companions. She became interested in them from the very desolation of her lonely life. They were two human voices near her. She envied them each other's company. They seemed to be kind to each other, brotherly. It was pleasanter to hear them than the grunting of pigs, the howl of a half-starved cur. Their Italian voices had a low rich sound as of music. Little by little her keen intelligence got to understand their *patois*, and she could follow almost every word they said.

They were keen politicians, talked much of France and of Italy, of secret societies, and of one great society which was to bind together the working classes all over the civilised world---a brotherhood before which kings and crowns were to go down, and palaces to crumble or be turned

into Phalansteries. They talked of the Carbonari; of Orsini, and his attempt upon the life of the Emperor; and how Napoleon visited him in his cell at Mazas upon the eve of his execution, and swore to liberate Italy from the yoke.

‘It was well for him that he kept his promise,’ said the elder brother; ‘for there are forty of the Carbonari who took a solemn oath to slay him if he delayed the redemption of the pledges he gave in his youth. But now he is with us. He, who a few years ago condemned a handful of students for holding a political meeting, now encourages the International with heart and hand.’

‘Every tradesman must go with the times,’ answered the other, with sardonic air,—‘the man who trades in kingdoms and sceptres most of all.’

‘And now the Emperor is going to help working-men to insure their lives, to leave something after death for the wife and little ones; and to make a fund against accident or illness. The State is to find part of the money. The workman is to pay his modicum.’

The other laughed aloud at this ideal of prudence and economy.

‘How many of those model workmen are there, do you think, who care what becomes of their brood when they are lying in their gratis

trench? If they have any spare cash it goes to the *assommoir*, or the *bastringue*. What we want is something more than to be helped to save our own money. We want to bring down masters to the level of their men; we want a fair division of profits, instead of starvation wages. What we want is co-operative labour: co-operation between workmen which should put an end to the patron; co-operation between the workman and the State which should do away with the middleman. We want to see the last of those harpies, the army-contractors, for example, who sweat their gold out of the brows of their journeymen. Let the Government give out their materials to a syndicate of workmen, who will return the finished articles at the bare cost of the labour employed upon them. No intermediary between the country that pays and the labourer who works. But, no; the Government would rather encourage the slave-dealer, the man who grinds the faces of the poor. I say that no man has the right to grow rich by another man's labour; and the great capitalist who employs a thousand labourers is as vile a cheat as the *Padrone* you and I have had to deal with, who grows rich out of half a hundred barrel-organs and as many white slaves to grind them.'

‘I know of such a one,’ growled the other; ‘a man who used to dine at a seven-sous *ordinaire* sixteen years ago. I have sat beside him many a time. He was a labourer, a mason’s drudge in those days. And now he is a great man; builds bridges, viaducts, railways, and is one of the millionaires of Paris. This Monsieur Ishmael used to be a voice among the Reds; he was a great man among us in the old days, when we were called the *Société de la Loque*, and used to meet in a back room at Vilette; but he has changed his tune since he has grown rich. They all change from the day they can manage to scrape together two or three thousand francs.’

‘*Grace à Dieu*, I have never let myself be corrupted by saving money,’ said the easy-tempered younger brother; ‘when I have two or three sous I change them for a glass of *pétrole*, which warms blood and brain, instead of cooling them, as money does.’

‘I have known the want of money heat a man’s blood to fever-point, to murder,’ said Gavot, the elder.

‘True,’ replied the younger, with a lazy yawn. ‘But so long as I have a handful of macaroni in the pot, and a shelter from the storm, I can make myself happy.’

‘I am not of your temper. I hate poverty; and I hate rich men. Ishmael has been a marked man for the last three years. Let him beware. The Prolos do not forgive renegades.’

This was the first time Pâquerette heard her husband’s name mentioned by the Neapolitans. After this she took a still keener interest in their conversation, and was always listening for that one name, or for any allusion to Ishmael. She heard them speak of him on several occasions, heard them talk of his successes, his wealth, with just the same keen envy that she had heard expressed by Hector de Valnois many a time upon the same subject. For that hatred which the loser feels for the winner in the race of life is a common weakness of poor humanity, exemplified on a large scale, say, by the hatred which Prussia felt for France from the day of her defeat at Jena to the day of her revenge at Sedan; and on a lower level, by the detestation of an insolvent baker for his prosperous rival in the same street.

Hector de Valnois, gentleman, poet, sybarite, had hated the self-made man for his victory over fortune; and from the lips of this organ-grinder, who had known Ishmael in his early struggles, Pâquerette heard the same droppings of venomous speech.

One night the two brothers—they who were for the most part so brotherly — quarrelled in their cups. Pâquerette heard them, and shuddered, discovering for the first time how terrible the wrath of these southern natures can be. They seemed to be on the point of killing each other. She heard them struggle, guessed from their speech that knives were brandished, and that blood was shed. She held her breath, expecting every moment to hear the death-groan. But the noise of the scuffle grew fainter, and died into silence. And next morning the two men went out with their organs, singing gaily, fast friends and good brothers.

And now, in the lurid August sunset, they were sitting outside her door, smoking their pipes and talking of Ishmael; talking in low and muttered tones, so that Pâquerette could only catch a word here and there.

This had gone on for some time, and then Gavot, the man who claimed old acquaintance with Ishmael, raised his voice, and said in an angry tone:

‘He refused me fifty francs—he—on the eve of his wedding with a wealthy Englishwoman, a marriage that will double his fortune, they say—refused fifty francs to an old acquaintance—

a brother of the *Société de la Logue*. There was a day when, if I had denounced him as a member of that secret society, he would have been sent to, Cayenne—as those others were, after the coup d’Etat. If I were to denounce him now it might be the worse for him—renegade—turncoat as he is. He refused me a handful of francs—refused help to an old fellow-workman; referred me to some benevolent society he has founded. I know them, those benevolent societies. They are invented to ask questions and pry into a poor man’s affairs, rather than to give him a dinner or a bed. And he is to be married to-morrow to an English lady—*une jeune Mees Lady Constance quelque-chose*; a grand marriage at the church of St. Philippe du Roule. Perhaps he may have more guests at his wedding than he has counted upon.’

He was to be married to-morrow. Pâquerette covered her face with her wasted hands, and the tears flowed fast between the transparent fingers.

‘He might have waited till I was *quite* dead; it would not have been long,’ she said to herself. ‘And yet, what difference can it make? I have been dead to him for years!’

They went on talking out there in the red angry glow of the sinking sun. Pâquerette heard

the drone of their voices, now loud, now low, but she listened no more to their words. She lay with her eyes shut, thinking of Ishmael. He was to be married to-morrow to a grand English lady—a woman worthy of his love. And she, Pâquerette, would be blotted for ever out of his life. Did he believe that she was dead, she wondered. Yes; it must be so. He was too honourable to marry if he thought she were living. Some one must have deceived him; some one must have told him she was dead.

‘It can make very little difference, since I shall be dead so soon!’ she thought. She had never hoped to be forgiven by him, never hoped to see him again. She had thought of him for years as of one who must needs scorn and loathe her. And yet it was almost as great a pain to know that he was to be married to another as if they two had clasped hands only yesterday, and the bond of love were but newly snapped asunder. She could think of nothing but of this marriage. She tried to picture the face of the bride: but she could only call up a vague image of a handsome countenance, cold and cruel, looking upon her with infinite scorn. And then she pictured Ishmael kneeling at that cold, proud woman’s feet, adoring her, happy with her.

And it seemed as if she, Pâquerette, had never truly lost him until now.

Gradually, imperceptibly, while summer darkness descended upon the City of the Sun, the waking picture changed to the fever-visions of a troubled sleep. Pâquerette was standing in a church, such a church as waking eye has never seen—so vast, so strange, so devilish in its hues of vivid carmine and glittering gold, like the flames of Pandemonium. And in slow procession towards the high altar came Ishmael and his bride, the English beauty, clad in white velvet and diamonds, like the Empress on her wedding-day; and for the bridal company followed all the rag-pickers of Paris, with their loaded baskets and their swinging lanterns, two and two, a fantastic train. The stench of the baskets, the smoke of the lanterns, stifled Pâquerette. She woke with a sense of suffocation—woke to hear loud and angry voices in the adjacent den, and to feel rather than to know that she had slept long, and that it was the dead of the night.

They were not fighting this time. Those voices were raised in angry denunciation of some one or of something; hoarse, thickened by strong drink, confused, almost unintelligible: but there was no quarrel. There was a third voice, which spoke in

Parisian French, interlarded with the slang which custom had made familiar to Pâquerette from her childhood. She had known the slang of workmen and *grisettes*, of actresses and singers, of journalists, and poets, and painters, and freethinkers, and socialists. And the man who was talking to the two Neapolitans in the adjoining shed spoke that language of which she had heard most of late, the figurative speech of the students' quarter, a vocabulary full of subtle allusions, almost every word charged with a history. The voice too had a familiar sound, but her weary brain could not recall where she had heard it.

The Italians had been drinking, and were half mad with drink. The elder Gavot vowed vengeance upon an old enemy. The Frenchman pretended to deprecate his wrath, obviously egging him on all the time. Pâquerette crept across the floor, and seated herself close to the partition. She sat with her ear against the rotten planks. The wood served as a conductor of sound. She could hear every syllable. Gavot's talk was incoherent, diffuse, rambling; the stranger's words were every one to the purpose. He came back always to the same point. He, in his own person, bore no grudge against this man Ishmael. But as a Prolo, as a member of that older Society of the Loque, as

one of the great brotherhood of humanity, he revolted against the tyranny of capital, against a man who, after absorbing the labour and the brains of other men, with the octopus arms of a hundred audacious speculations, could refuse fifty francs to his fellow-man, his companion of the past. Gavot told that story of the fifty francs again and again over his cups ; he beat it out like red-hot iron upon the anvil, and at every repetition the fiery sparks flew faster : until the man had maddened himself almost as much by his own words as by the liquid fire from the nearest wine-shop.

The talk lasted long, with infinite reiteration, accompanied at brief intervals by the chink of glasses, and the sound of liquor being poured from a bottle.

And at last, when the cold dawn, with its look of unearthly brightness, was staring in at the open window, Pâquerette, pale as a spectre in that livid light, sat with wide-open eyes, listening to Gavot's vow of vengeance on the traitor to the cause of Socialism.

He would be there at the church door, with his knife. There was a deed to be done as worthy as the slaughter of Cæsar, as heroic as the assassination of Marat ; a deed that should make France ring with the name of the doer.

‘I was one of the forty Carbonari who swore to kill Napoleon the Third, if he broke faith with the liberators of Italy,’ said Gavot. ‘There were princes and nobles among them : but there were men of the people also, and I was one of those. I would have killed the Emperor had he turned renegade. Where Orsini failed I should have succeeded, for I would have been bolder. And I will stab this renegade to-morrow at the church door.’

CHAPTER XI.

‘AND A STORMY WIND SHALL REND IT.’

IT was Ishmael's wedding morning, the morning which was to begin a new and glorious life, a life glorified by such a love as men dream of in the fervour and faith of youth's imaginings, but which few are so blessed as to realise in after life. Ishmael was one of those chosen few. His childhood had been spent in neglect and dishonour; his loveless boyhood had been embittered by a stepmother's jealousy; the cup of disappointment had been given him to drink in his early manhood; his married life had brought him only evil and shame in return for patient kindness and honest affection upon his part: but now, when the race for wealth had been run victoriously, when honour and renown had been acquired as the crowning grace of fortune—now, in the prime and vigour of his manhood, he was to realise that dream of bliss which every true man cherishes—the vision of union with a loftier soul than his

own, of being able to pour out the treasures of his love at the feet of a woman who, for him at least, should be half a goddess.

Overpowered, bewildered almost by his supreme content, he paced his study in the Place Royale in the fresh summer morning, the soft south wind blowing in upon him from the grave old square, with its blossoming limes and its kingly statue, solemn, tranquil, remote from the stir and tumult of the great city. He had been at work at yonder desk for the greater part of the night. His lamps had not been extinguished till sunrise, and then he had only lain down for two or three hours’ sleep, before rising again for his cold bath and his toilet. A coffee-pot and a light breakfast of rolls stood on a table by the open window. The big office table was covered with papers, classified, arranged, to be ready for his secretary and his clerks during his absence. He was to start that evening upon a long honeymoon; first to Pen Hoël, to show his wife the cradle of his race; then all through Brittany; and afterwards to the south of Ireland. He wanted to see that fair and fertile land in which Constance’s childhood and girlhood had been spent, a province as romantic and unique as his own rustic Brittany. They two had planned that honeymoon holiday stage by stage.

Each was to show the other the haunts of childhood and youth. It would bring them even nearer together, strengthen just a little the perfect bond of sympathy, to tread the old pathway side by side, to recall for each other the beginning of either life.

On their return to Paris, Lady Constance's villa in the Bois de Boulogne was to be their wedded home, while the good old house in the Place Royale was to remain Ishmael's office. His working life was to be in no wise altered by his marriage. He was still to be one of the master-spirits of an age of progress. Viaducts, railways, roads, canals, were to be continued as if no revolution had changed the life of the engineer. Constance had never sought to beguile her lover into the sybarite's empty existence, to transform the worker into the man of society. 'You will give me as much of your company always as you can, Sébastien,' she said; 'and I promise not to be jealous of your work.'

'My dearest, the happiness of my days will be with you, and the hour that you tell me you are tired of a working man for a husband, I will begin to wind up my business life, so as to be your slave, and yours only.'

'I shall not do that until I feel that you have

come to the time of life when a man should rest from his labours,’ she answered, gravely; ‘when the grinding of the great wheel should cease, and a man may sit by his hearth and say, “My work is done.” I can look forward with content and hopefulness now to old age, Sébastien, for it will be the holiday of our wedded lives. And before I knew you I used to think of my declining years with a shudder, as a time of loneliness and regret.’

After this they talked of that far-off future, the day of repose from life’s conflict and labour; and planned how they would live sometimes in the old house at Pen Hoël, which was to be improved into the very perfection of a rustic manor-house; sometimes in a dower-house on the banks of the Shannon, which Constance had inherited from her mother. Some part of every year was to be spent in Paris, for neither Constance nor Ishmael could conceive the possibility of an old age in which contact with their fellow-men could cease to be a necessity of their lives. They had planned everything in those fond forecastings of wedded life which lovers delight in. Their days and years were laid out as a garden, a garden in which there should be neither weed nor thorn, thistle nor bramble of temper, jealousy, ill-will, or discontent; only the fairest flowers of love and mutual bliss.

And now Ishmael walked slowly up and down, and in and out of the suite of spacious rooms on the first floor in the fine old, panelled house, built in the days of the second Bourbon king, and mused upon the life he was leaving, the life upon which he was entering. The life which was to end to-day had been a desolate life. Rich in fortune, in success, in honour, but barren of domestic joys, passing poor in love. These old walls had looked, with their sombre colouring of years long gone, upon lonely hours, days and nights given to dryest work; and only once in a way had they beheld a social gathering, a bachelor's dinner of four or five earnest men, all workers like the host. For nine years, ever since the beginning of his wealth, Ishmael had occupied that first floor in the Place Royale. The quiet old square, with its shadowy trees, the sober old-panelled rooms, had taken his fancy. It was just such a sombre and retired home for which his wounded heart languished. He took to himself a clever old housekeeper, a woman who for seven and twenty years had kept house for one of the greatest *savants* of France, a woman who knew how to respect an isolated studious life, and how to provide for the comfort of a master who had no idea of caring for himself. With such a servant

Ishmael's domestic life had gone upon velvet : but if it had been without trouble, it had also been a stranger to joy.

As he looked round the rooms to-day in the light of his new happiness, he wondered how he could have endured that loneliness so long. A life without domestic love. Ah ! how long the days and nights seemed to look back upon : monotonous days and evenings in which there had been no variety, but the variety of labour and care. Those dark panels had reflected his lamps night after night, till the edge of morning, and had seen him bending over the same desk, on the wide table spread with maps and plans, and estimates and calculations of quantities, in the same attitude, hour after hour.

The adjoining room across which he paced this morning, needing all the space possible for the expansion of his glad thoughts, was his *salon* and dining-room in one. He had furnished it with the solid old rosewood bureau, the massive chairs and tables from his old home at Ménilmontant, even the black marble clock with the bronze sphinxes which had sounded so many weary hours for Pâquerette's impatient fancy, eager for pleasure and excitement, in a city where the fever of dissipation seemed in the very air men breathed.

There were the old things, vividly recalling the old life on the threshold of the new. There, in a recess by the fireplace, stood Pâquerette's piano. Poor little piano! In his anguish and rage at his wife's dishonour, Ishmael's first impulse had been to smash the thing, to break it up for firewood, burn it to ashes. But, with his axe uplifted for the work of destruction, he had relented. The strings vibrated with a mournful sound as he waved his hatchet in the air, a minor wail like a cry of despair. It was as if it were a living thing he was about to slay—a roe caught in the thicket. No; he could not hurt the poor little piano. He kept it by his fireside, though to look at it was always pain, so vividly did it recall Pâquerette. And many a time between midnight and early morning he had risen, wearied, half-blinded by pouring over figures and plans, and had seated himself at this little piano to pick out old tunes, simple melodies by Grétry or Mozart, with his clumsy, uneducated fingers.

The old piano, part of his domestic sorrow, was to be undisturbed by his new joy. Lady Constance had looked at it curiously on her first and only visit to her lover's home. She had driven there with Amélie Jarzé one afternoon, to see what a house in the Place Royale was like. At

least, that was the motive put forward when she proposed the visit to Ishmael, though perhaps the real desire was to see the background of her lover’s daily life.

The piano caught her eye before she had been two minutes in the room.

‘What, you play then?’ she exclaimed.

‘So badly that it is hardly to be called playing,’ he answered, reddening a little.

‘Yet well enough to have a piano in your room.’

‘It is a relief to me sometimes to stumble through an old melody, when I am very tired of dry-as-dust work.’

‘I am sure you play well, and I am enchanted at the idea,’ cried Constance. ‘Do play something for me.’

Ishmael declined the honour, smiling at her eagerness.

‘Either of your footmen would play as well as I.’

‘And yet you—a serious business man, a famous engineer—have a piano in your *salon*!’

‘Why not? The piano was a fancy of mine. Is a working man to have no fancies?’

‘Your piano has such a very feminine look,’ said Amélie, full of curiosity. ‘And here is an old

music book,' she said, standing by the piano and twirling over a volume; 'an opera of Grétry's, with some of the soprano songs scribbled all over with a master's instructions. Your sister's book, no doubt?'

'No, mademoiselle: I never had a sister. That book belonged to a person who was no relation to me.'

This was strictly true. The volume was a second-hand one, picked up at a bookstall by Lisette Moque, lent by her to Pâquerette, who learnt some of the songs with her old singing master, and never returned the volume to its owner. It had been moved among other books from the third floor at Ménilmontant to the first floor in the Place Royale.

Amélie recurred more than once to that little incident of the piano and music book in her after conversations with Lady Constance Danetree, but she failed in kindling a spark of jealousy in Constance's steadfast mind. Her love was supreme in all noble qualities, most of all in faith.

The contract which secured to Constance the whole of her fortune, and gave her a magnificent settlement on the part of Sébastien de Caradec—otherwise Ishmael—had been executed over night. The civil marriage was to be performed at eleven

o'clock ; the religious ceremonial at twelve. Fashion among people of Constance Danetree's rank prescribed that the civil marriage should take place on one day, the religious ceremonial the day after : but Constance cared nothing for fashions and conventionalities, and she and Ishmael had been of one mind in preferring that both ceremonies should be performed within a couple of hours, leaving them free to hurry away from the tumult and glare of Paris at the earliest opportunity.

It was to be a very quiet marriage. Only Constance Danetree's chosen friends, and three old friends and associates of the bridegroom had been invited.

Ishmael's three friends were men of considerable distinction in their various callings : one a practical engineer like himself, a man whose inventions and improvements had increased the wealth and well-being of his country ; another, a well-known physician ; the third, a *savant* and a man of letters. Ishmael's idea of friendship was quality rather than quantity. In his seventeen years of Parisian life, he had made many acquaintances ; but he could count his friends upon the fingers of one hand.

At a quarter before eleven he was at the Mairie, attended by these three friends of his,

waiting for his bride. At five minutes before the hour Constance arrived, accompanied by her old friend Lady Valentine, who had known her from girlhood, and her new friends Hortense and Amélie Jarzé, who by sheer persistence had contrived to interweave themselves in the woof of her life. And certainly Amélie was no disgrace to the ceremonial. Her bright golden hair was set off by the daintiest little bonnet, all rosebuds and lilies of the valley. Her white muslin frock was a flutter of lace flounces and palest pink ribbon; her gloves and parasol were of the same delicate pink. Not an article of her toilette was paid for, nor was likely to be paid for within a reasonable period. But the *couturière* had been more amiable to Lady Constance Danetree's particular friend than she would have been to Monsieur Jarzé's impecunious daughter. Amélie had taken her dear friend to Madame Volant's luxurious rooms in the rue de la Paix, and with a little dexterous management had induced her dear friend to lay out five or six thousand francs upon Madame Volant's novelties; a gown exactly like that just made for the Countess Walewska a mantle like one ordered yesterday for the Empress. On the strength of Lady Constance's purchases, Amélie had ordered her frock and

bonnet for the wedding: and albeit she was to assist at the consummation of her own defeat, she was bent on looking her prettiest upon this particular morning. Monsieur de Kératry was to be at the church; and their betrothal was now an established fact. It was only a question how soon his circumstances would authorise marriage; and if not rich, he was at least noble, good-looking, clever, and Amélie thought herself much better off than Hortense yonder, with her pale pinched face and anxious eyes, and her hopeless passion for that poor little impostor Paul de Pontchartrain.

Constance looked as shy as a girl of eighteen as she came slowly towards the table, behind which sat the Maire in his tri-coloured scarf, the awful functionary whose sign manual was to make her Sébastien's wife. Her gown and bonnet of cream-coloured *crépe de chine* were simplicity itself. What need of fine gowns and bonnets to express happiness? *That* shone and sparkled in the lovely violet eyes, luminous under their long dark lashes, which drooped a little more than usual this morning. She gave her hand to Ishmael when the brief ceremony was over, and he led her out to her carriage.

'Now I am half your wife,' she said, smiling at him. 'It is already too late for repentance.

The thing cannot be undone. Oh, what a stormy sky! And I hoped the sun would smile upon our union.'

'The sunshine is in our hearts, my beloved,' he whispered.

The storm-clouds which had been darkening the sky at intervals ever since yesterday's sunset now brooded black and heavy over the golden dome of the Invalides, and the leaden sky made a sombre background behind the Marly Horses in the Champs-Élysées, where not a leaf of the blossoming limes stirred in the heavy atmosphere. Weather can make no difference to a man whose whole being is steeped in gladness, before whose eager feet the gates of Paradise are opening: and yet Ishmael felt a vague sense of oppression, a nameless foreshadowing of evil, as his brougham drove along the rue du Faubourg St. Honoré, under the splashing of heavy rain-drops.

There was a rumble of distant thunder as he alighted hastily in front of the church, anxious to be ready to receive his wife, whose carriage followed.

There was an awning before the church door, and a crowd under the awning. The usual cluster of shabbily-clad idlers; men, women, and children, curious about every movement in that world of

the wealthy and high-born which was as remote from their own world as if it were in another planet. The crowd was rather bigger than it usually is on such occasions, for Ishmael had given *carte blanche* to a florist in the rue Castiglione, and the altar was more exquisitely decorated than for an ordinary wedding. The carrying in of the flowers had been a sufficient sign of something out of the common; and the crowd had been growing ever since ten o'clock.

Ishmael's brougham had scarcely driven away, when the other carriages approached. He had no time to look at the faces in the crowd before Constance had alighted. In another moment her hand was through his arm, and they two were on the threshold of the church together.

Before they had passed that threshold there was a sudden movement in the crowd, a shriek of fear from Constance, as a man broke through the throng, and sprang upon Ishmael with a dagger in his hand, uplifted to strike.

Rapid, decisive as that movement was, it was not so quick as that of a pale, forlorn creature in the front row—a sickly face and a feeble figure that had been leaning for the last half-hour, faint and weary, against the moulding of the church door, the shabbiest, wretchedest figure in that mixed

assembly. Swift as was the hand with the dagger, the white-faced woman intercepted the blow. She flung herself upon Ishmael's breast as the assassin's arm descended; and it was her shoulder that received the knife meant for his heart.

The wound was severe, but not fatal. Pâquerette lifted her wan eyes to her husband's face.

'I have saved your life,' she murmured, faintly. 'God is very good to let me do it.'

'Pâquerette!'

'You know her, then!' faltered Constance, clinging to him, envious of this pale, squalid creature who had saved the man she, Constance Danetree, loved, and would have died to shield from harm.

'Know her! yes, too well, too well. Where are we to take her? What are we to do for her?' he asked, looking at Dr. Dureau, his medical friend.

The Italian had been seized, was in the grip of the police, instantly, as it seemed to the spectators.

'Take her to the hospital,' said Dureau, taking Pâquerette in his arms, and looking at the ghastly face. 'That is about all you can do for her. The blade has pierced the pleura, if it has not touched her lungs. It is a bad case. Is there any surgeon in the crowd?'

There was none, as it seemed; so Dr. Dureau

despatched a messenger for one of the cleverest surgeons in Paris, who lived near at hand.

‘Not to the hospital,’ said Ishmael, hurriedly; ‘to my house. She has saved my life.’

‘A decided obligation, if it was not an accident,’ answered the physician. ‘But I think the hospital would be better.’

‘No, no ; to my house. You can take her there in my carriage. Dureau, I depend upon you to do all—all—that can be done for her. Loraine,’ to his friend the *savant*, ‘give Lady Constance your arm to take her into the church. I will rejoin you presently.’

‘You will not be long?’ said Constance, deadly pale, but calm and collected, as it was her nature to be in a crisis.

Her friends, Lady Valentine, Hortense, Amélie, crowded about her, suffocated her almost with their attentions.

‘Pray let me alone!’ she exclaimed, impatiently. ‘I have not been stabbed.’

She walked up the nave, between the crowded chairs, the staring gaping spectators, in an atmosphere heavy with incense and hothouse flowers. She walked with a firm footstep, her head carried as proudly as ever, but her heart beating passionately, full of tumult and fear.

What did it all mean? There was a mystery somewhere, a history of the past in which that white wan creature was involved. Women do not fling themselves between the victim and the knife without a motive stronger than abstract benevolence. This woman had saved Sébastien Caradec's life, most likely at the cost of her own. A woman does not do as much as that for the first comer.

This act of to-day was the last link in a chain; and it was for Ishmael to enlighten her as to all the other links before they two should kneel side by side at yonder altar.

She was his wife already. Yes; by the law of the land. But not by the sacrament of the church. She, a Roman Catholic, counted that legal ceremonial as of smallest importance. In her own mind the union of to-day was no union till the church had sanctioned and sanctified it.

She seated herself a little way from the embroidered carpet upon which they were to kneel. The tapers were burning amidst clusters of waxen bloom, stephanotis, Cape jasmine, tuber-roses. The altar was one brilliant mass of gold and flame and colour. She sat there with her eyes fixed, seeing neither tapers nor flowers; seeing only the woman's livid face lying on Ishmael's bosom.

He of whom she thought was busy in assisting

at the departure of the carriage with the wounded, and perhaps dying woman. The surgeon had come, in answer to Dr. Dureau's summons; cushions were brought from the church and arranged in the carriage, so that Pâquerette could be conveyed to the Place Royale in a reclining position. Ishmael scribbled a pencil note to his housekeeper requesting her to do all that the utmost care could do for the patient. The carriage was to call for a nursing Sister on its way through the Marais. Everything was planned rapidly, decisively, for Pâquerette's comfort. She seemed only half conscious when they laid her in the carriage. Just at the last moment, Ishmael bent down and kissed her cold hand.

‘I thank you, Pâquerette,’ he murmured, and the white lips answered with a feeble smile.

‘And now,’ said Dr. Dureau, when Ishmael's carriage had driven off, with the surgeon seated by Pâquerette's side, and all arrangements made for her comfort, present and future, ‘I think you had better go and perform the second act of your wedding drama.’

‘Not to day,’ said Ishmael: ‘I could not, Lady Constance would not wish—’

‘I think Lady Constance will wish to make as little of a scandal out of this business as possible,’

replied his friend. 'The fact that an Italian fanatic attempted your life, and that a beggar-woman saved it, is no reason why your marriage should not take place to-day.'

'But there is a reason,' said Ishmael. 'There can be no marriage to-day. I must see Lady Constance alone.'

Dr. Dureau shrugged his shoulders.

'You are the hero of the play, and you must finish it in your own fashion,' he said. 'It was near ending in a tragedy fifteen minutes ago. What motive could that man have for attacking you?'

'None, but his own ill-will to one who never injured him. He is a member of a secret society to which I have belonged for many years—a socialist, a carbonaro—what you will. He came whining and begging to me the day before yesterday. They all do, these acquaintances of my poverty, though they denounce me for having grown rich. I refused to give him money, referred him to a benevolent institution with which I am connected, and which relieves the deserving.'

'You say you never injured him! And you refused him money, yesterday! As if that were not the deadliest injury. A Parisian would write a libellous paragraph about you. A Neapolitan rushes at you with his knife.'

Ishmael went up the nave to the space in front of the altar where the wedding party was grouped, Constance seated in the midst, very pale, but with a superb repose of attitude and manner, as if nothing extraordinary had happened. The wedding guests had a more fluttered air, expectant, excited. The organ was playing Beethoven’s ‘Hallelujah Chorus’ from the *Mount of Olives*. Priests and acolytes were waiting.

‘Lady Constance, may I speak with you for a few minutes in the vestry?’ asked Ishmael.

Constance rose, and went with him towards the vestry door.

‘It is what I have been wishing for,’ she said, as they entered the room, which was empty. ‘This ceremony of to-day can go no further till you have explained the mystery of that woman’s devotion.’

Ishmael closed the door, and stood with his back against it, facing Constance, deadly pale, but with no touch of the craven in his aspect.

‘Alas! my beloved,’ he said, ‘this marriage of ours can go no further to-day—nor for many days—perhaps never, unless you are very kind and pitiful to me. There is no mystery. There is only a terrible surprise. The woman who threw herself between me and that man’s dagger is my wife.

She is the wife who abandoned me thirteen years ago, and of whose death I was assured. I had ample evidence. Not till I had conclusive evidence of her death did I ask you to marry me. That was why I held back in the first instance, waiting for certainty. Well, I was duped by a scoundrel, whom I paid for duping me. The evidence of my wife's death which was given me was a fabrication. That is all. And my unhappy wife still lives!'

There was a silence. Constance looked at him with sad, reproachful eyes. Her lips trembled a little before she could find words; and then she said falteringly:

'You might have told me everything. You might have trusted me as I trusted you.'

'You had no dark story in your past life—no plague-spot. I shrank from talking to you of my first marriage. I was only one-and-twenty years of age when I married a foolish girl, low-born, ignorant, reared in the gutter; a girl who might have been at least respectable as my wife, but who chose another fate. And now at the last, after thirteen years, in which she has given me not one sign of her existence, she rises up at my feet out of the stones of Paris, and sacrifices her own life to save mine.'

'So long as she lives you are bound to her.

‘Whether it be for months, or for years, you owe her the devotion of your life,’ said Constance, with intense conviction. ‘Whatever her guilt may have been in the past, her sacrifice of to-day is an atonement.’

‘How she came to be there at the moment of peril; whether it was accident, or if she knew—it is all a mystery,’ said Ishmael.

‘She will explain all—if she recover.’

‘Constance—I call you by that dear name, perhaps for the last time—can you forgive me? Will you believe that I am guiltless in this miserable entanglement?’

‘I have always believed you,’ she answered, with a queenly smile. ‘And now take me back to my carriage. Let nobody suppose that we are ill friends.’

They went back to the nave together. Ishmael explained that, under the agitating circumstances of this morning, Lady Constance and he had decided to postpone the marriage ceremony. He felt it his duty to look after the poor creature who had jeopardised her life to save him. He might also be wanted at the examination of his would-be assassin before the *Juge d’instruction*.

Lady Constance invited her friends to the breakfast which had been prepared for them; but all

had the grace to decline. Only Lady Valentine offered to accompany her old friend home ; but Constance owned that she would rather be alone.

‘I shall get over the morning’s agitation better by myself,’ she said ; and the carriage drove off with her alone, Ishmael standing bare-headed to watch her depart.

And so ended his wedding day—the day which was to have begun a new life. Three hours later they two were to have been seated side by side in a railway carriage—a *coupé* specially retained yesterday in advance—on their way to Pen Hoël.

Someone touched him on the arm. It was an official, who requested him to go at once to the office of the *Juge d’instruction*, before whom Gavot was about to be examined. Dr. Dureau, and Ishmael’s two other friends, both witnesses of the attempt, were also wanted.

CHAPTER XII.

‘THE MORNING IS COME UNTO THEE.’

THE Venetian shutters were half closed upon the open windows of the old panelled room in the Place Royale. A sober old room, soberly furnished, cool and airy even in this sultry August weather. The faint rustle of leaves, the measured tread of occasional footsteps sounded in the grave old square outside. Tranquillest corner of Paris, remote from the traffic and the din, meet home for poet and philosopher; and oh, what a blessed change from the City of the Sun! What an earthly Paradise, after that hell upon earth!

Pâquerette was lying on her soft white bed in the roomy alcove yonder, under finest linen, perfumed with roses and lavender, screened by cool draperies of soft gray damask. Pâquerette was resting luxuriously on the last stage of a journey which had grown tranquil and pleasant as it drew to its close. She lay propped up by large white pillows, scarce whiter even in their fresh purity

than the thin, pinched face looking out of them. Her pale, transparent hand toyed idly with a large bunch of Dijon roses that lay upon the coverlet. There were flowers on the mantelpiece, flowers on the table near the bed, flowers on the window-sill—a luxury of flowers.

A Sister of the order of St. Vincent de Paul sat a little way from the alcove, and watched the patient, ready to minister to the smallest wish. She could do little more than smooth that steep descent to darkness and the grave. Pâquerette was dying. She had been dying by inches in her den in the City of the Sun: and now death was coming towards her with swifter footsteps—now, when she was at peace in that soft, sweet bed, amidst the scent of roses, with the afternoon light making bars of gold upon the polished oak floor, between the Venetian shutters. Beyond those half-closed shutters, she saw green leaves and the blue sky. No grunting and squeaking of swine, no yapping of mangy curs assailed her ear; no foetid odours sickened her.

She was at peace; her sins were confessed and forgiven. A good old priest from Ishmael's native village had come to her bedside, as fast as diligence and railway could bring him. Ishmael had telegraphed for him within an hour of the scene

at the church door. Good old Father Bressant had knelt by her bed, had heard her faltered expression of deepest penitence, and had given her such comfort as the Church can give to the remorseful sinner.

And then he whose face she dreaded, yet loved to look upon, had come and sat beside her pillow, and had taken her pale wasted hand in his strong grasp, and had given her pardon for the bitter irrevocable past, for the one mad act which had blighted two lives. Very tenderly had he acknowledged the love that had come between him and murder: and they two had prayed together, recalling the fond, sad memory of the child they had lost, the prayers said beside the little coffin, the grave on the side of the hill.

‘Let me be buried with my baby,’ she pleaded; ‘if—if—other people have not taken the grave for their dead.’

‘Paquerette, do you think I should forget my child’s resting-place? That was the first freehold I ever bought.’

‘And you will let me be buried there?’

The mother shall rest beside her child.’

‘Bless you for that promise, Ishmael. I have only one other prayer. The poor old grandmother—so old, so wretched, so feeble, leading

such a miserable life; bent, and weary, and half blind, and yet toiling on—will you save her from that horrible life, remove her from that hideous place where the rag-pickers herd together in the dirt, like animals? Will you do that, Ishmael, for——?’ She was going to say ‘for my sake,’ but she stopped herself, and faltered humbly, ‘for the sake of what I once was to you.’

‘The poor old grandmother shall be cared for. I would do much more than that for your sake, Pâquerette.’ And then he told her of the children’s home in the rich, wooded country beyond Marly le Roi. He told her of the happy colony of little ones rescued from the slums of Paris, from such places as the Cité du Soleil. He told her how, for her sake, he had devoted some portion of his wealth, and much of his time and care, to this purpose, and how the work had prospered. ‘If I can help it, by precept or example, there shall be no children growing up in the dark yards of Paris, neglected, desolate, untaught; as you were in the days of your youth, my poor Pâquerette.’

‘Yes; it was a miserable youth, was it not? And afterwards, when you were so good to me, when foolish people praised me, my head was turned. Life was all so new and strange, and I

was eager for pleasure, for music and brightness,—all the joys I had missed when I was a girl. And then I was base and ungrateful, and my wicked heart rebelled against you, and turned——’

A flood of tears drowned her speech. She clasped her thin fingers over her eyes, and was silent, remembering how she had set up an idol of clay, a false god that had fallen and crushed her, amidst the ashes of a ruined life.

The grey-robed Sister had left during this conversation. She came back at a summons from Ishmael, and knelt by the bed, praying, in a low gentle voice. Ishmael bent to kiss the pale brow, so soon to assume the awful coldness of death, and then went softly away, leaving only the womanly consoler, the voice of prayer and praise.

No one in the house knew what was the link between the famous engineer and the dying woman: an erring sister, perhaps, brought suddenly back to the fold; or if not a near kinswoman, a close friend. No one guessed that it was Ishmael’s guilty wife whose last hours were ebbing gently away.

Two doctors—the most distinguished in Paris—were in attendance upon that death-bed. They both were of opinion that the wound in itself would

not have been fatal. The lungs had not been penetrated, and the injury to the pleura might have been got over in a healthy patient. But Pâquerette had been marked for death months ago.

‘The wonder is that she could have walked from Clichy to the faubourg Saint-Honoré, in her state,’ said the physician. ‘It was the act of a heroine. She tells me that she started soon after daybreak, and that she was several hours on the road. She had no money, no alternative but to crawl every inch of the way, while every breath she drew was pain. It is only women who can do these things.’

A piteous story, yes; and a story that had come to its closing page. Pâquerette lived for a day and a half after she had been forgiven, and died with Ishmael’s roses in her hands, peacefully, in the morning glow, like a child sinking to sleep.

It was not till after Pâquerette’s death that Ishmael tried to bring the trickster Dumont to book for the conspiracy which had been hatched against his honour and his happiness. The remorseful afterthoughts of many a bitter hour had told him that he had himself to blame for having trusted a broken-down profligate with a delicate mission, and for

having put a price upon the evidence of his wife's death. His passionate desire to be free to marry the woman he loved had blinded him to the folly of his act—had tempted him to lean on such a rotten reed as Dumont.

He called to his aid one of the cleverest members of the Parisian police, and in the dusk of the evening after Pâquerette's death he revisited the Cité Jeanne d'Arc, in the company of this man. The police-officer was dressed in plain clothes; but to the initiated eyes of the inhabitants of that colony he had the word *Raille* inscribed in capital letters upon his forehead.

They went straight to the house which Ishmael had visited with Dumont, ascended to the fourth landing, and without even the polite preliminary of a knock, entered the room in which he had heard the dying Spaniard's story. They found themselves in the bosom of a large family, seated cheerily round the *pot-au-feu*, the savoury reek of which rose superior to the foul odours of the place. The inhabitants were new; even the poor sticks of furniture were different from those which Ishmael had seen in the room. And yet he was sure that it was the same room, as he had taken careful note of the number on the door on the previous occasion.

The people were civil—nay, overpoweringly

courteous, and evidently overawed by the presence of Ishmael's companion. The man was a street-hawker, and laid considerable stress upon the honesty and respectability of his avocation as compared with the pursuits by which many of the citizens of Jeanne d'Arc contrived to make their living. He made a point of being thus far autobiographical before he could be induced to give any information about his predecessors in the apartment.

The Spanish sailors? Yes; there had been two Spanish sailors in the room before he took it—just three weeks ago.

‘One of the men died, did he not?’ asked Ishmael. ‘He was dying when I saw him on the second of July.’

‘Dying! But no; the Spaniard was no more dying than I, Jacques Dubourg. He is a man who smokes opium, and spends half his life on shore in a state of stupefaction—worse than drunkenness, and yet not so bad, for he lies quiet on his *grabat*, and interferes with no one. It was on the third of July that he and his comrade cleared out of the room. They were going back to Havre by the night-train. They had only been in Paris a week, and had hired their sticks of furniture from the guardian of the place, the porter at number one,

who collects the rents and looks after the keys. I know all about it, you see, messieurs, for I and my family came in just an hour afterwards, and the porter could only give us a room in the roof where the rain comes in by the pail-full; so I was on the watch for the chance of a better room, and as soon as the Spaniards cleared out we came down to the fourth floor. It is luxury after the hole we had above!’

This was the utmost information to be obtained here. Ishmael acknowledged the hawker’s civility with a handsome *pour-boire*, which he dropped into the willing hand of the wife, hoping that by this precaution his benefaction might be spent upon something better than vitriol or ‘little blue:’ and then he and his companion went downstairs and picked their way through the muddy channel to the door of number one, where they found the custodian of the place in an apartment which, although passing grimy, was at least wind and weather proof.

From this functionary they could obtain little more information than had been given them by the hawker. The Spanish sailors had come to the *cité* in the company of a decent-looking Parisian, who engaged the room for them, and paid in advance for a month’s rent, and for the hire of the

little lot of furniture. One of the sailors was represented as an invalid, who wanted to rest and recruit himself before he could go back to his ship. The porter supposed that they would occupy the apartment for at least a month. He was therefore much surprised when they brought him the key of their room on the afternoon of July the third, and informed him that he could take back his furniture. He had not seen their Parisian friend after the first occasion. This was all he knew.

The facts were clear enough to the mind of Ishmael. The story of the wreck of the 'Loro' was a trumped-up story, invented by Dumont, with the aid of the Spaniard. Or the story of the 'Loro' may have been a true story, in all save Pâquerette's presence on board the vessel. The Spaniard, a chance acquaintance, perhaps, picked up at Havre, had been carefully taught the part which he had to play in the conspiracy; and Ishmael had been tricked into mistaking the symptoms of opium-poison for the signs of approaching dissolution. One fact, and one only, was not easily to be explained. By what means had the Spaniard or Dumont obtained possession of the packet of letters written by Hector de Valnois to Pâquerette, letters which no woman would have willingly parted with to a stranger?

Here was a mystery which neither Ishmael nor the police could fathom, not knowing the link between the man called Dumont and the writer of the letters.

The actual fact was that Dumont, *alias* de Valnois, finding himself alone in his kinsman's lodging, soon after he had received his commission from Ishmael, had ransacked Hector's bureau in the hope of finding some scrap of Pâquerette's handwriting which might serve him in the plot he was hatching, and had there discovered the packet of old love-letters, carefully put away by Pâquerette herself, in a hiding-place at the back of other papers.

On the day after Pâquerette's funeral Ishmael received a letter with the post-mark of Limerick. It was from Constance, who wrote from the chief hotel in that city:—

'I am on my way to the dower-house at Kilrush,' she wrote, 'where I shall spend the coming autumn. I think it only right that you should know where I am, and that you should be free from all anxiety upon my account.

'Do your duty, Ishmael, and fear not the issue. If it please Providence that your wife recover from the peril she incurred to save you, take her

to your heart and home again, if it be possible, and let your future happiness be found in that re-union. It is impossible you should continue unhappy, if you follow the dictates of honour and conscience. God will be with us both, near or afar, so long as we walk bravely in the straight path.

‘ Ever your loyal friend,

‘ CONSTANCE DANETREE.’

So much, and no more. Enough at least to tell him that there was no anger against him in that noble soul. He telegraphed his answer within an hour.

‘Death has broken the old tie. In three months from to-day I shall go to the dower-house at Kilrush, unless you forbid me.’

Three months of mourning for the wife who had died to him thirteen years before; three months of hard work, which made his severance from his beloved easier to bear; three months during which time the Neapolitan Gavot was found guilty of an attempt to murder, and was condemned to *travaux forcés* for life; three months which saw the espousals of Amélie Jarzé with Armand de Kératry; three months in which the *teinturier* sank day by day a little lower in

that awful gulf of mental decay to which the absinthe-drinker descends; three months during which the semi-imbecile hag from the Cité du Soleil awakened suddenly from a life-long dream of dirt and squalor to find herself in a wonderland of cleanliness and comfort, represented by the neatly-furnished bedchamber of a hospital for old women. Here Mère Lemoine sat by the cosy little stove, and hugged the warmth, and gibbered and nodded in the sunshine, and muttered to herself about Jeanneton and Pâquerette, and asked her caretakers piteously for a taste of *pétrole*, *vitriol*, *casse-poitrine*—what you will; and it may be she sometimes regretted the freer life of the City of the Sun, the lantern and the basket, and the bottle of fierce potato-spirit hidden under the heap of rubbish and offal in the middle of her den.

It was the first week in November, the season of fallen leaves, low gray skies, and fox-hunting, when Ishmael went down the Shannon in a small steamer that plied between Tarbert and Kilrush. Those level shores of the noble Irish river, widening ever towards the sea, looked gray and mournful under the dull autumnal sky, white vapours creeping slowly over the fields in the eventide; and the coast on which he landed in the dusk had a barren

look : but the little town showed more lighted windows as signs of life than a *bourg* in his native Brittany could have shown, and though there were some signs of decay and neglect, there were no indications of the hard, grinding poverty which forbids the lighted hearth, the rush candle, and curtails the cheery evening hour.

The driver of a dilapidated jaunting car took forcible possession of Ishmael on the instant he landed ; and in this conveyance he was rattled along rustic lanes, which had a friendly look in the twilight, like and unlike the lanes about Pen Hoël. He could feel the salt breath of the sea, and he found out afterwards that he was driving with his face towards the Atlantic. He passed a good many typical Irish cabins, roughly built of stone, rich in broken windows and all the traces of neglect. Yet in most cases the open door showed the cheery hearth within, the dresser with its gaily-coloured crockery. That dresser and that crockery seemed to be the national representative of the household virtues, the *penates* of the Irish peasant. Where all else was squalor and ruin, the dresser and the row of plates and jugs still remained : the very altar of home.

But a sharp turn of the road carried the traveller into a new region, a lane in which the

cottages were more numerous, better built, with neatly-thatched roofs, steep picturesque gables, and tall clustered chimney-stacks; cottages in well kept gardens, where late autumn flowers were blooming, a little oasis of beauty and domestic comfort in a neglected land.

‘It is her influence,’ he thought. ‘I am drawing near her home.’

He was not mistaken: about a quarter of a mile further the car entered a gateway by a Gothic lodge, drove through a magnificent shrubbery of conifers and arbutus, and drew up in front of a low, long Tudor house, with a roomy stone porch, in which a tall, beautiful woman, dressed in dark velvet, stood waiting for him, with two dogs, his old friend Lion, and a superb Irish setter, in attendance upon her.

He was by her side in a moment, clasping her hands. He had written to her, and had heard from her more than once during the three months that ended to-day; but this was their first meeting since they parted at the church door on that day which was to have made them one for ever. And now the day was coming which was to complete that union. All arrangements had been made in advance, and to-morrow, in the Roman Catholic Chapel at Kilrush, Sébastien Caradec and

Constance Danetree were to be married, in the presence of old Lord Kilrush, who had returned from Homburg, disgusted alike with the results of the water cure and the *rouge-et-noir* cure. For in those days there were gaming-tables at Homburg-on-the-Maine.

To-night Ishmael was to rest at the Priest's house, the chief among those rustic dwellings which Constance Danetree's taste and outlay had called into being. On the Marquis's land the signs of neglect and dilapidation were as common as on most other Irish estates; but in this little corner, this happy land of two or three hundred acres, which belonged to his daughter, order, neatness, and prosperity reigned.

'Surely I can afford to spend as much on building a cottage as Spricht charges for one of his gowns,' she said, when some worldly-wise acquaintance remonstrated with her on the folly of spending her surplus income on the improvement of the dwellings of the poor.

'But they are not grateful,' complained her friend. I built new cottages for some of my people, and gave them delicious little kitcheners; and from that hour I have never had any peace at my country place. They don't understand the kitcheners, and they come and howl to me every time one of

those poor little stoves goes wrong. Improvement is a mistake with those people. Let them grub on their own way, and give them plenty of wine and brandy when they are ill. That is *their* idea of a good landlord.’

‘I don’t care about gratitude,’ replied Constance; ‘but I adore pretty cottages, and bright hearths, and well-fed, comfortably-clad children: and I must have them about me whatever they cost. I can go without ostrich-feather bordering for my gowns, and I can buy a gown or two less in the course of the year.’

They talked together for a few minutes in the old panelled hall, those two happy lovers; and then Ishmael went into the drawing-room with his *fiancée* to be presented to Lord Kilrush, an aristocratic old gentleman, with a Roman nose that had been slightly damaged in the days of his youth, a small waist, an elegant swagger, and a set of antique seals hanging from an antique chain, which he played with almost perpetually with delicate, nervous fingers.

He received Ishmael graciously, and made himself very agreeable all dinner-time, but evidently had not a thought in common with his future son-in-law. His conversation was chiefly made up of inquiries about some of the worst

people in Parisian society, and the raking-up of old scandals which seemed to have sunk deep into his mind, and old *bon-mots* on the verge of impropriety.

After dinner he went to sleep in a luxurious arm-chair, close by the wide old-fashioned fireplace, and Ishmael and Constance had the rest of the evening to themselves.

They were married next morning in the pretty little chapel, and this time there was no tragic interruption of their wedding. The old Priest snuffled a pious exhortation to the newly-wedded, the rustic choir sang a hymeneal hymn, and Lord Kilrush's carriage bore Ishmael and his wife on the first stage of their journey to Killarney, where they were to begin their honeymoon, under the soft gray skies, beside the calm blue lake, amidst groves of arbutus, bright with autumn's scarlet berries, beneath the shadow of the Purple Mountain.

In December they went back to Paris, Ishmael full of work, his wife full of pride and interest in that work of his : proudest of all when she saw the children's home beyond Marly, and heard that chorus of multitudinous voices sending up their glad peal of welcome, 'Monsieur Chose ! Monsieur Chose !' while the happy faces all wore one broad

smile of childish love. In all things she was his help-meet. In great achievements, in acts of benevolence ; sharer of all his hopes, and all his dreams ; noble inspirer of noble ideas.

And now for his wife’s sake—the pride of birth being an instinct among well-born women—he who had been known so long throughout the length and breadth of the land as Ishmael, allowed himself to be known in Parisian society as Sébastien de Caradec, of Pen Hoël ; and now the old château above the winding Couësnon was beautified, restored, and expanded into one of the most perfect country houses in France ; and wider lands were added to the shrunken estate of the Caradecs. Ishmael, the despised and outcast, had redeemed the fortunes of his race, and won renown for the name of his forefathers.

“Peace hath her victories as well as war.”

CHAPTER XIII.

‘IN THE MIDST OF BABYLON HE SHALL DIE.’

WITH the closing of 1867 the shadows darkened over the political horizon, and the Imperial star which had once ruled in so fair a heaven now rode in a sky that was charged with storm-clouds. Outwardly, this city of palaces, boulevards, and cafés, was as brilliant as ever: but there was a worm at the root of the tree; trouble and confusion were in the minds of men; the nation found no place for the sole of her foot, between an Empire which was no longer Imperial in its policy, and a constitution which was not created. Even the little *bourgeoisie*, the narrow-minded gentry of the factory and the shop, who only wanted to sell their goods and fill their purses, even these were gloomy, looking upon this International Fair that was just over as the fat kine which would be found by-and-by to have eaten up the lean kine, forestalling public expenditure, and leaving a series of dull seasons to follow, in a dispiriting future of impoverishment and decay.

That tragic memory of Queretaro weighed heavily on many a heart, while the Mexican loan had emptied many a widow's purse and pinched many an orphan. Nearer at hand there were rumours of a conspiracy, fulminating-cotton manufactured in cellars, a secret society called the Commune Révolutionnaire des Ouvriers de Paris. The Red Viper, warmed in the bosom of the Empire, was turning its sting upon its protector.

In a letter written at this time by one of the Emperor's most faithful adherents, the note of warning, the cry of peril, was for the first time boldly sounded in the Imperial ear. ‘The Empire crumbles on every side. Your enemies, under the pretext of founding a parliamentary *régime*, have sworn your ruin; your ministers truckle to your adversaries; they abandon at a stroke the policy of the last fourteen years; your house is in flames.’

So wrote Persigny to his master: but the warning fell on a dull and reluctant ear. That Imperial master's health was failing, his mind was troubled by the inroads of an insidious disease. He who, in the bright morning of life, in the maturity of manhood, bold to audacity, with equal faith in himself and in destiny, had trusted in the star of his house,—now looked to that star to save him from perils with which his genius had no longer power to cope. He who once crossed

the stream at the head of his legions, reckless how fierce might be the battle on the further shore, now folded himself in his Imperial mantle, in the sublime isolation of a neutral policy, and told his people that the temple of war was closed. Yes; the temple of victorious war was closed for ever for Napoleon the Third and his subjects—a temple draped in sackcloth. Victory had departed from France. The reign of the Eagles was over.

It was in the early Spring of 1868, when the buds were unfolding upon the Emperor's tree,—that chestnut in the Imperial gardens which was supposed to bloom just a little while before all other trees,—it was in the bright balmy beginning of a fine April, that an event occurred which made a twenty-four hours' wonder for the idle, talkative great world of Paris, and distracted society for that brief space from the rumours of war, the discussion of the Emperor's proposed journey to Rome, Monseignor Dupauloup's manifesto on the subject of female education, and the exciting anticipation of a certain political journal of an ultra-revolutionary colour, to be issued presently by Henri de Rochefort, late contributor to the *Figaro*.

In these days there still existed in the vicinity of the Châtelet an old, old street—marked for

destruction, but not yet destroyed—a street historical with sinister histories; picturesque from the standpoint of painter or poet; hideous, revolting, as a place in which to live; perilous as a place through which to pass. The police of Paris, excellent, brave to recklessness, but much too few for the work they have to do, avoided this rue de la Vieille Lanterne, unless summoned thither by some special cause. It was an abode of crime, given over to criminals. The *pantre*—or layman—who penetrated the mystery of the place went thither at his peril.

This hideous alley ended in a kind of staircase, leading to a street on a lower level. On one of those balmy April mornings, when the breeze blowing from the river seemed charged with the perfume of distant orchards and flower gardens, or at least with the breath of the flower-market yonder—a man was found hanging from the massive old iron bar of a window in the house looking upon this staircase,—dead.

He was not an inhabitant of the street, nor was he known to any of its occupants, who came out of their doors, and hung out of their windows, in a matinal disarray, to stare and wonder at this strange guest who had come among them in the darkness of the night, and had taken up his abode there so quietly, none hearing the groan or the sigh

with which his spirit fled from its gaunt and wasted tenement. He looked like a gentleman, though his garments were in the last stage of shabbiness, just as his poor frame was in the last stage of attenuation.

The police were summoned, took their cool survey of the details of the case: a new rope bought on purpose for this final act, and tied securely to the stout iron window-bar; a loose block of stone by which the suicide had clambered to the window, tied his rope, made his noose, slipped it over his head, and then kicked away the stone. It was all as simple as *bon jour*. This repulsive spot had doubtless been chosen as a haven where a man might kill himself in peace, secure from sympathy, rescue, officious interruption. In Paris, where suicide is a fine art, this new development astonished nobody.

There were no papers in the dead man's pockets. The police had only to carry the corpse to the Morgue yonder, and leave it there for recognition. Some one would be sure to recognise. The hour of recognition came quickly. A medical student from the Boul Mich strolled into the Morgue to look about him, by way of education; saw the haggard face lying there, with a strange, wan smile, half *débonnaire*, half cynical, and recognised an old acquaintance of the Ecossaises and the Pantagruel; a man who was the most brilliant talker in the

circle of Râtes at the latter resort—a man who of late years had called himself Jean Nimporte, but who was well known to all literary Paris as Hector de Valnois, author of *Mes Nuits Blanches*; once one of the finest critics, and one of the most promising poets in France: a man who might have been a power in the land. Alas! Hades is peopled with the pale, pinched shades of the men who might have been great!

The student's eyes clouded as he stood looking down at the patrician face, the delicate chiselling of the features, accentuated by the rigidity of death.

‘Poor devil! Was not the absinthe-poison killing him fast enough, that he must needs take a short cut to his coffin?’ he muttered. ‘Well, I will send round the hat to-night at the Pantagruel, and we will bury him decently, with Balzac and the rest. Rouméstan, the eloquent young Marseillaise advocate, who is going to be one of the greatest men in France, shall make a speech above his grave.’

Within a week of the closing of that grave in the cemetery of Père Lachaise, the Vicomte de Pontchartrain's second volume of poems, *Charniers et Sépulcres*, was given to the Parisian world; a dainty little volume, attenuated as the Vicomte himself, printed on satin paper, bordered with carmine, enriched with symbolical initials and floral tail-pieces.

The verses were received with enthusiasm by that little knot of advanced thinkers who welcome the wild, the extravagant, the audacious, the obscure in art and literature; and in the Paris of those days advanced thought was considered a distinction, not that in 1867 we had quite reached that outspoken Gospel of Atheism which is the latest vogue by way of poetry. The verses were the last development of the spasmodic school—*du Baudelaire poussé au vif*, said one of the critics; bitter as absinthe; despairing; the death-throes of a life's agony; and despite of many flaws, the book attracted the town, and was talked of everywhere.

The little Vicomte was enchanted with his success. His book was talked about wherever he went. He was called upon to explain and elucidate certain passages: his meaning here, the subtle, underlying intention there, this or that profound thought: not always an easy task for a poet of the obscure school. But Pontchartrain came through it splendidly; philosophised and declaimed to circles of listening women, breathless as they hung upon his eloquence. In a word, he was the fashionable success of the season the sought-for in every *salon*.

It was during a *soirée* at the Tuileries, when the poet had been complimented by the Emperor himself, and had retired from that august presence

flushed with visions of the Legion of Honour and the Academy, that Madame de Kératry, exquisitely dressed in a gown by Spricht, laughing, joyous, triumphant in her new rôle of *jeune mariée*, took him into the embrasure of a window, and asked him to sit by her side for a few minutes, as she had something—a little secret, a laughable anecdote—to tell him.

And then, beaming at him with radiant smiles, she told him of her visit to the *teinturier's* den, and how she and Kératry had been hidden in the loft, and had heard him bargaining for the verses which had made him famous.

‘Do not you feel, now that your book is creating a *furor*, that you might have given that poor creature a little more money for his work?’ she said, reproachfully. ‘And I heard the other day that he hanged himself in an old street in Paris, in an interval of insanity, brought about by drink; much more, perhaps, by poverty and the wretched life he led. There was an account of his funeral in one of the papers; a grand speech made by a young advocate called Rouméstan, whom people talk of as the successor to Berryer and Arago.’

‘The verses you talk of were mere experiments—impossible attempts which I collected as a curious study in the decadence of a once brilliant mind,’ said the Vicomte, trying to make the best of a

desperate situation. 'You cannot for a moment suppose that I——?'

'That you palmed off another man's work as your own? Of course not, Vicomte; especially after your indignation one day at Lady Constance Danetree's, when I mentioned the *teinturier*: "*Cela ne se peut pas!*" you cried, in a tumult of fine feeling; "*Cela ne se peut pas!*" If I were to tell people that story!'

She burst out laughing, hiding herself behind her fan, in a convulsion of mirth.

'I daresay you have told every creature of your acquaintance,' exclaimed Pontchartrain, furiously.

'Not a mortal. But I confess, that if it had not been for the sake of Hortense, who is silly enough to believe in you and to admire you, I should have told all Paris. The story is too good to be locked up in my memory.'

'Perhaps, for your sister's sake, you will continue to keep your counsel about a matter which you entirely misunderstand,' said the Vicomte, with dignity; and then he rose and stalked away, leaving Madame de Kératry still laughing behind her fan.

He proposed to Hortense next morning, and is happy in the worship of a wife who still believes in him, long after the world at large has found out that he is a sham.

THE END.

